ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Book of

KINGS & QUEENS

Amazing stories of monarchies from pre-Roman times to present day

WAR • BETRAYAL • CONQUEST • MURDER • HONOUR • LOVE

Welcome to

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Book of KINGS & QUEENS

Throughout history, monarchs have had a huge impact on the world, whether uniting nations or tearing them apart. Some have inherited great power, while others have fought to take what they saw as rightfully theirs. There have been kings that instigated wars to demonstrate their strength and conquer the world, and queens who helped shape the future of their nations. In this newly revised edition, we take a look at some of the most iconic and influential monarchs the world has ever seen, from Nefertiti and Boudica, ruler of the Iceni, to William the Conqueror and Marie Antoinette. We'll also take a look at the 30 kings and queens who changed the world, the bloody battles of the War of the Roses, separate truth from myth in the tale of King Arthur and discover the story of Britain's reigning queen, Elizabeth II.

KINGS & QUEENS

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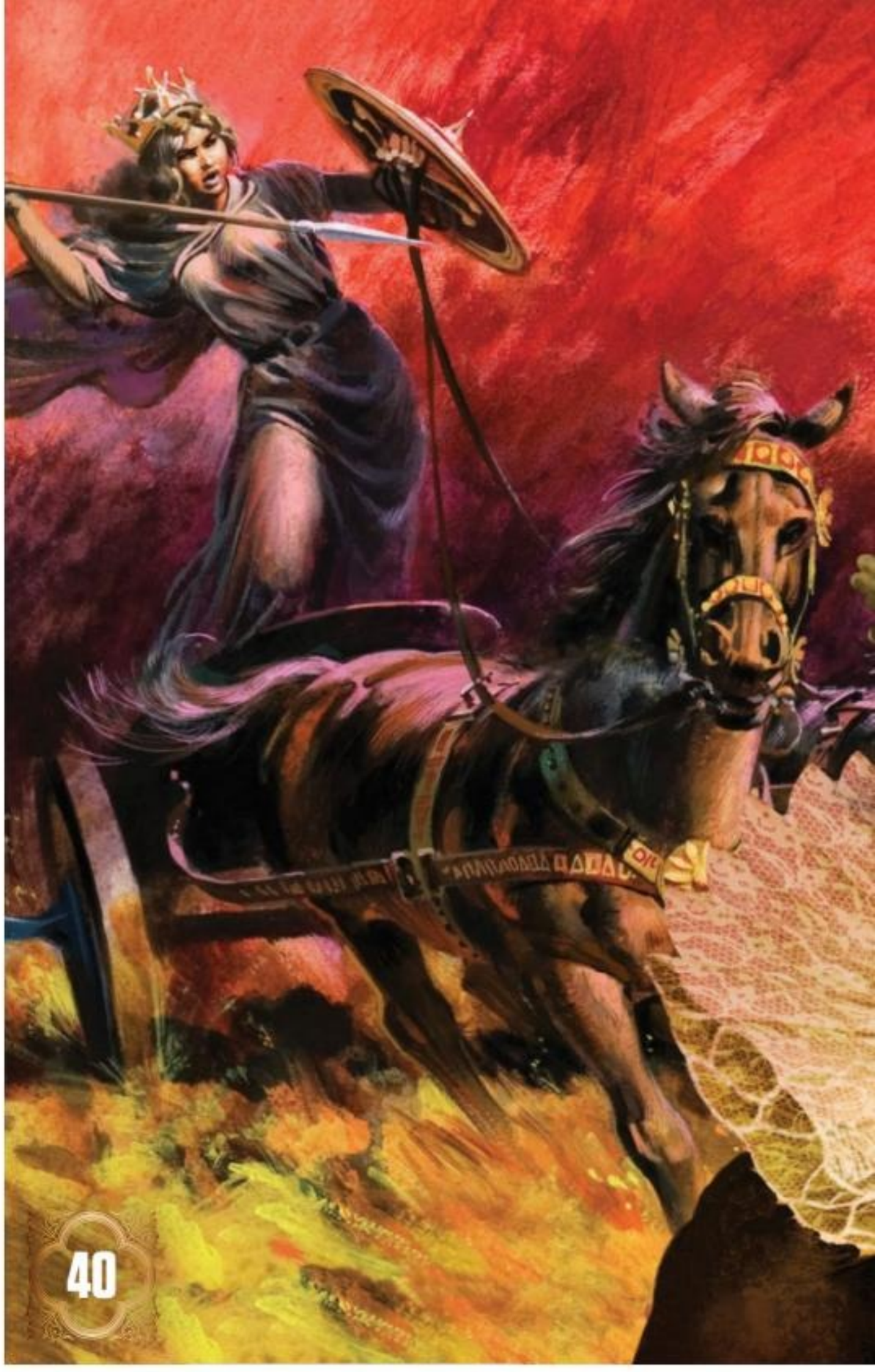

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Kings and Queens who changed history

Monarchs have ruled kingdoms the world over for centuries, but only these few have changed the course of history during their reigns

Elizabeth I

Defeated the Spanish Armada - 18 August 1588

The Virgin Queen who reigned over a golden age, paving the way for the British Empire

REIGN 1558-1603

COUNTRY ENGLAND AND IRELAND

LEGACY

DEFEATED THE SPANISH ARMADA, RETURNED ENGLAND TO A PROTESTANT RULE AND LED A GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION, THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Elizabeth I was both highly intelligent and well loved by her people, nurturing and defending England and its culture while transforming it into a global power

She was known by several names – the Virgin Queen, Good Queen Bess, Gloriana – and the legacies of Queen Elizabeth I are many, but of all the ways that she changed the world, there is one episode of her life in particular that stands out. It was the summer of 1588, and having been angered by his 'heretic', 'illegitimate' sister-in-law Elizabeth I, the Protestant ruler who succeeded the English throne at 25 years old after his wife Mary I died, the Catholic King Philip II of Spain invaded England with a great fleet of 22 galleons and over a hundred armed merchant ships.

The attack of the Spanish Armada marked the beginning of an unofficial war between England and Spain that had been brewing for years. Releasing England from the Catholic Church re-imposed on it by Philip II and his late Queen Consort, Elizabeth I had not only resurrected the Protestantism that the Spanish rulers sought to quash, she had gone on the year before to formalise treaties with Protestant rebels in the Netherlands. For a King who wanted to remove all trace of Henry VIII's assault on Catholicism, it was galling to see his daughter Elizabeth solidify Protestant power in Europe.

Meanwhile, pioneers of her realm like Sir Francis Drake were undertaking expeditions of exploration, making enemies of the Spanish as they did so. Philip II was said to have put a price of 20,000 ducats (around £4/$6.5 million) on Drake's head for his piracy against Spanish vessels. Spanish animosity had built to breaking point while Elizabeth I was building the beginnings of what would later become the British Empire, all while supporting artists, thinkers and writers like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe at home, and leading a golden age for the arts and sciences.

Highly intelligent and very well educated, Elizabeth I surrounded herself with people she could trust and built strong relations with her people that fostered a sense of solidarity. As the Church was breaking apart in Europe and monarchs wrestled for power, Elizabeth I stood for Protestantism while still honouring English Catholics by preserving some of their practises. She gave a sense of identity to England at the point preceding its global dominance.

And on 18 August 1588, about a week after her navy routed the Spanish Armada at the Battle of Gravelines, chasing it up to the Scottish coast, Elizabeth I gave one of the world's most famous speeches to the troops at Tilbury, a force of 4,000 who were standing by ready to defend the Thames Estuary against any attempt to take London. She promised to take up arms herself against any prince of Europe, and declared: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a King."

Victoria

Grandmother of Europe becomes Empress of India - 1 May 1876

The Queen who led the Industrial Revolution and ruled the largest ever empire

Queen Victoria's reign was a time of transition towards new technologies and infrastructures, and at the Great Exhibition in 1851 she saw new machines like the camera, talking and printing telegraphs, microscopes, locomotives and more. But one of Victoria's many lasting legacies was her expansion of the British Empire on a massive scale. Until the death of her husband Prince Albert, after which she descended into a period of depression and mourning that overshadowed her later years, Queen Victoria was a vibrant presence who represented the spirit of the times.

Her 63-year reign - the longest in British history until Elizabeth II surpassed her in 2015 - saw the British Empire encompass a quarter of the world's land, with Britain's colonies spanning the globe and its navy ruling the seas. In 1857, however, a series of mutinies began in the armies of the East India Company, with sepoys who had been working for the Company beginning to rebel against occupation. One of the turning points in the struggle for independence was the moment when a soldier was asked to bite open one of the cartridges for his rifle, which were usually made using animal fat forbidden to the Sikh and Muslim sepoys. It sparked an uprising that led to the dissolution of the East India Company.

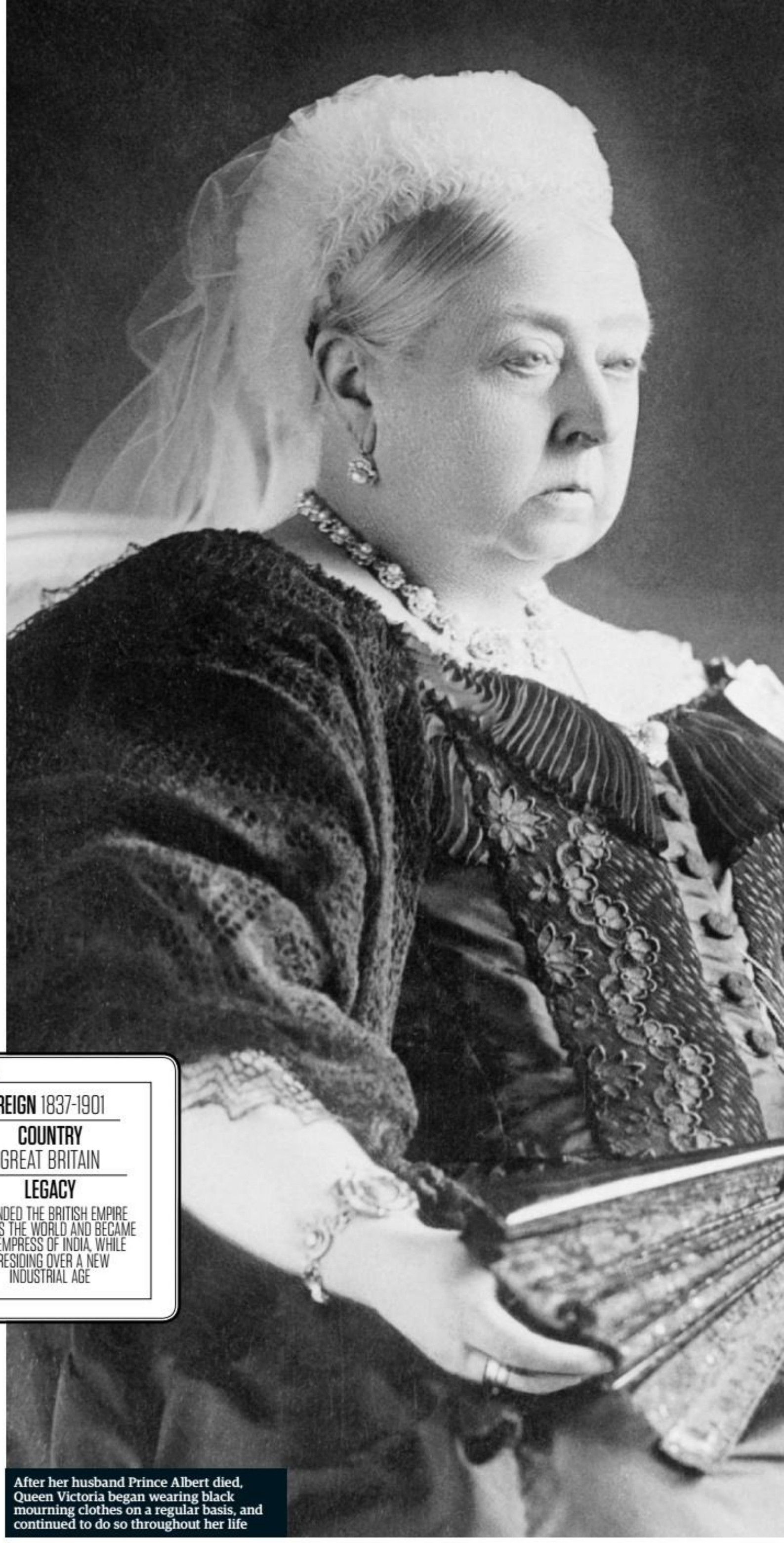
The rule of the East India Company, which had been governing Indian lands with private armies, passed to Victoria, and this began the period of British Raj rule that lasted until India declared independence in 1947. During this period, Victoria oversaw the construction of vast rail networks at home, where she became the first British monarch to travel by train, and saw the first passenger line in North India opened in 1859. In 1876, Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India, and marked the height of British colonialism.

The far and fervent reach of British colonialism had an unmistakable impact on global history, and Victoria was the face of it. Her standards, morality and decisions shaped the face of the world, and tied British culture to that of dozens of other countries. There are few Queens who gave their names to an age, but Victoria was one of them. Not only that, she earned the name 'grandmother of Europe' by raising nine children who married into nobility across the continent, tying together its aristocracies just as she knitted together her global empire and brought Britain to the peak of its rule.

REIGN 1837-1901

COUNTRY
GREAT BRITAIN

LEGACY
EXTENDED THE BRITISH EMPIRE ACROSS THE WORLD AND BECAME THE EMPRESS OF INDIA, WHILE PRESIDING OVER A NEW INDUSTRIAL AGE



After her husband Prince Albert died, Queen Victoria began wearing black mourning clothes on a regular basis, and continued to do so throughout her life

Henry VIII

Created the Church of England – November 1534

The king who brought about the Protestant Reformation and shaped modern Christianity

One of England's lustier Kings, Henry VIII defied Rome and changed the course of Christianity in both Britain and Europe through his desire to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and marry Anne Boleyn. By 1526, Catherine, daughter of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand II, was over 40 years old and had failed to produce a male heir for Henry. After multiple miscarriages she no longer appealed to the King, and he became infatuated with the younger, prettier Anne Boleyn.

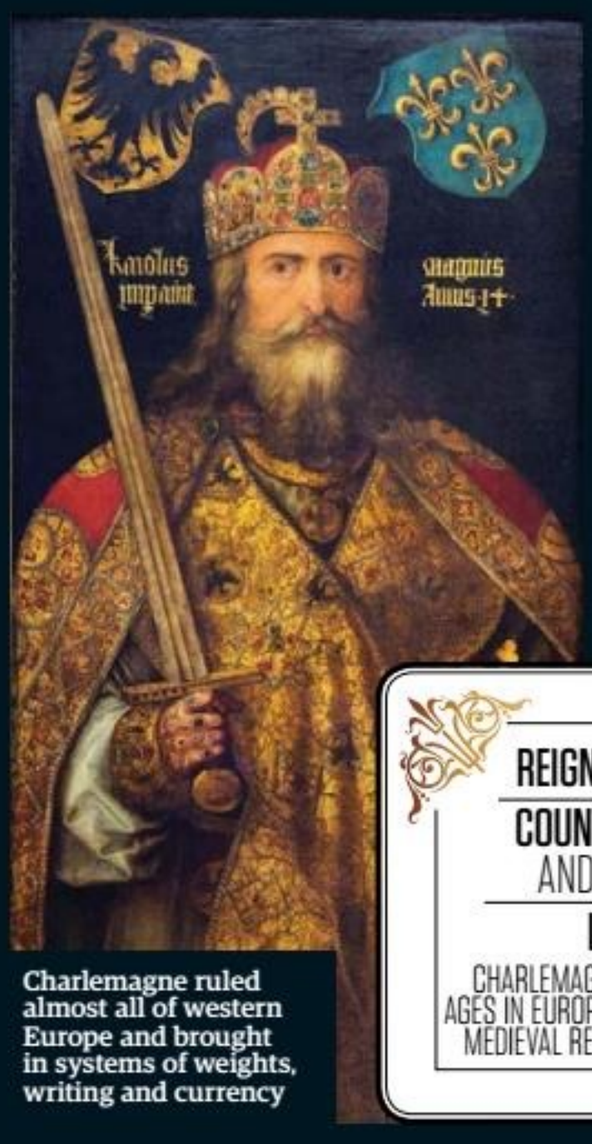
When he married Catherine in 1509, he first had to get the Pope to grant a dispensation accepting that her earlier marriage to Henry's brother Arthur had never been consummated. Now, in order to annul his marriage to Catherine, Henry needed the Pope to agree that the opposite was true; that her marriage to Arthur *had* been consummated. This looked unlikely, so Henry took matters into his own hands. It was around 1527 when he began openly consorting with Anne Boleyn, and 1529 when he began attacking the church through his government, changing legislation and levying new taxes. It culminated in Henry's abrupt disappearance with Anne, and subsequent banishing of Catherine and her daughter from London after they returned a month later. Henry was threatened with excommunication unless he 'cast off the concubine, Anne.' His response was to enact a bill to remove almost all of Rome's subsidies from English churches.

REIGN 1509-1547
COUNTRY ENGLAND
LEGACY
DEFIED THE POPE AND CATHOLICISM BY DIVORCING TO REMARRY, AND TURNED ENGLAND PROTESTANT IN THE PROCESS

Eventually, in 1534, Henry passed the Act of Supremacy that declared him 'the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England', removing papal authority from Britain and making himself the head of state and religious affairs. By this time, Anne had already given birth to a girl, and was surrounded by rumours of infidelity. Henry beheaded her for these crimes, executing her for treason, adultery and incest, and went on to marry Jane Seymour in May 1536.

Pope Paul III excommunicated Henry, and the Church of England seceded from Roman Catholic rule. Protestant reformers didn't gain much ground in the years immediately following the end of Catholic rule, but it did pave the way for future change. Henry brought the Reformation to England, and his son (with Jane Seymour), was the first English monarch to be raised a Protestant.

A dashing man in his youth who grew morbidly obese in later years, Henry VIII nonetheless took six wives between 1509 and 1547



Charlemagne ruled almost all of western Europe and brought in systems of weights, writing and currency

Charlemagne

United western Europe in the Carolingian Empire – 800 CE

Charlemagne ruled the continent for the first time since the Romans and led a Renaissance

King Charles the Great, or Charlemagne, was King of the Franks, Italy and later became the 'Emperor of the Romans' in a move that divided the vestiges of the old Roman empire forever. His coronation by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day 800 CE had circumvented the claim of Empress Irene of Constantinople. What Leo had done was legitimise a second claim to the imperial authority that dated back to the first Roman emperors, and so started centuries of competing claims of sovereignty.

REIGN 768-814 CE
COUNTRY FRANCE AND GERMANY
LEGACY
CHARLEMAGNE ENDED THE DARK AGES IN EUROPE AND MADE THE FIRST MEDIEVAL RENAISSANCE POSSIBLE

Long before then, though, young Charlemagne became King of the Franks. Initially, he shared the rule of the kingdom with his brother Carloman, but his death in 771 left Charlemagne the sole ruler of the entire Kingdom. He went on from there to conquer the Lombards and become King of Italy in 774, and the expanded Frankish state he created eventually went on to become known as the Carolingian Empire, after Charlemagne's family name. Charlemagne's rule saw the Carolingian Renaissance, the first of three that were to sweep medieval Europe between the 8th and 9th Centuries, and during this time there was a marked increase in literature and architecture, the arts, legal and religious studies and more.

Some of Charlemagne's own writings, like the Admonitio Generalis, opened up discussions of rational ideas across Europe, and during his reign he introduced administrative reforms throughout the land. He has since been called the 'father of Europe', and both the French and German monarchies consider Charlemagne to be a part of their history. Not only did he oversee this Renaissance, he took part in it. Charlemagne standardised weights, measures and coins, devising systems of pounds, feet, livre, shillings and pence, and he even tried to standardise Christianity throughout his empire. Charlemagne instilled his love of learning in the monastic schools that he developed during his reign. He saw an end to the Dark Ages following the death of Rome.

Isabella I of Castile

Sent Columbus to the New World – 17 April 1492

Isabella of Castile united the Spanish Kingdoms and funded the discovery of the century

Remembered as the 'Mother of the Americas' by some, to others, Queen Isabella I of Castile will always be remembered as the architect of the Spanish Inquisition that ravaged Europe during her reign and for decades afterwards. She and her husband Ferdinand II, King of Aragon, Naples, Sicily and Valencia, united the old Spanish Kingdoms under their rule and modernised their collective kingdom, freeing it of debt and restructuring its politics. It was the beginning of Spain as we know it, and Isabella and Ferdinand made a powerful team.

When Christopher Columbus came to them seeking protection and finance for a voyage to discover the New World, they assisted him. On 17 April 1492, Isabella and Ferdinand signed a commission making him admiral of a funded fleet, and with that support planted Spain and its culture firmly in the Americas.

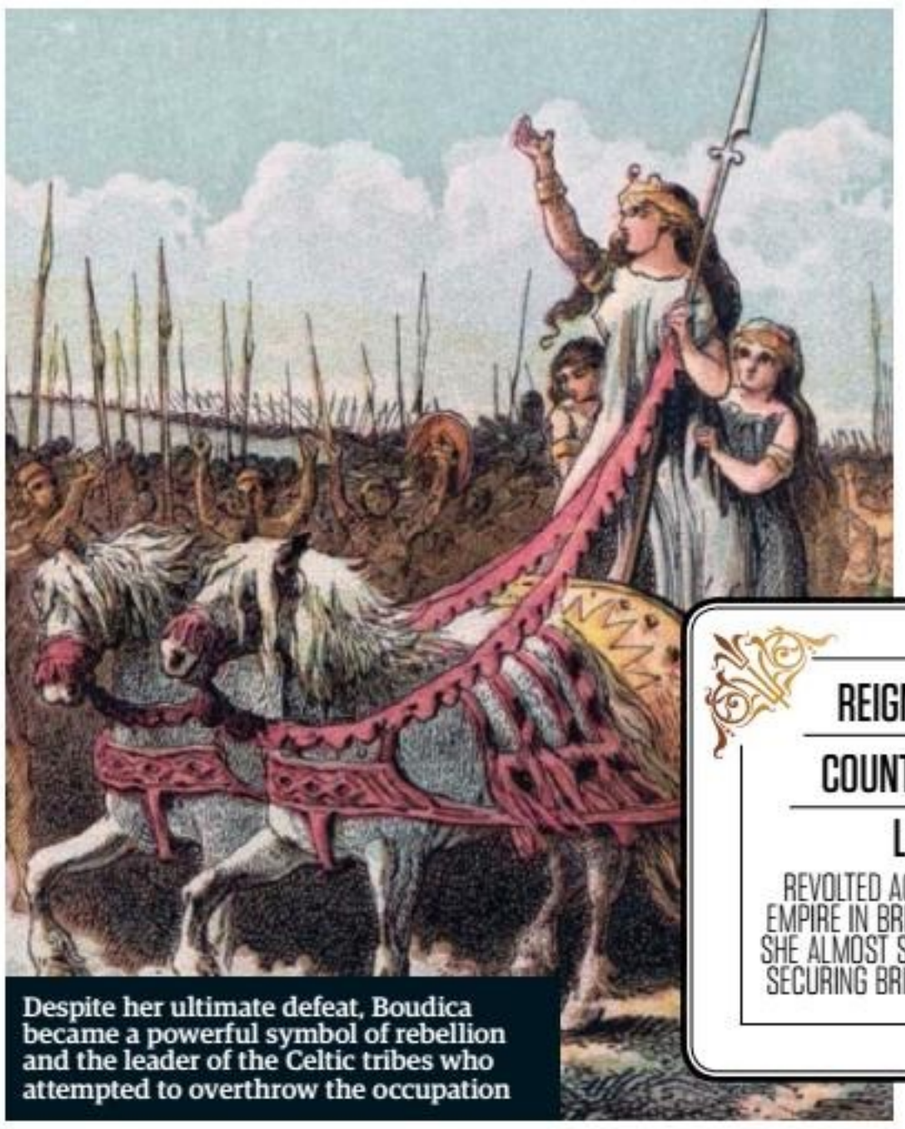
REIGN 1474-1504

COUNTRY SPAIN

LEGACY

GAVE PROTECTION AND FINANCE TO CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, GIVING SPAIN A STRONGHOLD IN THE AMERICAS THAT STILL HAS A POWERFUL LEGACY TODAY

Financed Christopher Columbus' journey to discover the New World and raised the Spanish Inquisition to power with her husband Ferdinand II



Despite her ultimate defeat, Boudica became a powerful symbol of rebellion and the leader of the Celtic tribes who attempted to overthrow the occupation

Boudica

Lost the last battle for resistance to the Romans – 60/61 CE

Queen Boudica led the southern Celtic tribes in revolt against Roman rule

REIGN 60-61 CE

COUNTRY BRITAIN

LEGACY

REVOLTED AGAINST THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN BRITAIN AND, ALTHOUGH SHE ALMOST SUCCEEDED, ENDED UP SECURING BRITAIN FOR THE ENEMY

Queen of the Iceni tribe in what is now known as Norfolk, England, Boudica repelled the Romans from Londinium, the capital, before eventually falling to the governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus. Though ultimately unsuccessful, she almost threw the invaders out of Britain for good, and left an indelible cultural mark that led Queen Victoria to claim her as her spiritual forebear centuries later.

When Boudica's husband, King Prasutagus of the Iceni, died in 60 or 61 AD, the Romans were quick to capitalise on this opportunity. They flogged Boudica, raped her daughters, and called in their debts from the tribesmen. Boudica fought through these terrible trials and went on to lead 100,000 Iceni and other old East Anglian tribes in revolt against the Ninth Spanish Legion and the capital of the Roman lands, Londinium. The later defeat of Boudica, however, ensured Roman rule in the south of Britain for generations to come.

REIGN 336-323
COUNTRY MACEDONIA; ALSO EGYPT, PERSIA & ASIA
LEGACY
CREATED ONE OF THE GREATEST ANCIENT EMPIRES IN HIS QUEST TO DISCOVER THE GREAT OUTER SEA AND THE END OF THE WORLD

Alexander the Great

Invaded the 'end of the world' - 326 BCE

Alexander the Great's empire comprised most of the known world as his forces turned towards India

Alexander the Great faced tens of thousands of infantry and cavalry men, as well as war elephants, when he invaded India

King Alexander of Macedon came to power after his father, King Phillip II of Macedon, was assassinated in 336 BCE, and he inherited both a strong kingdom and a capable army. He put them both to work quickly, proving himself a ruthless leader who was changing the world with his vision.

Continuing to establish himself as an extremely capable military tactician, his armies defeated the Persian Achaemenid Empire, leaving Alexander to rule Persia and Asia Minor, and then swept on towards India, which was the edge of the known world at the time. Alexander sought to rule over the Aegean as Athens had done before, and as he marched his left great cities in his wake, naming each one Alexandria. By 326 BCE he had made it deep into India, where his army now struggled against the jungle, harsh climes and ferocious warriors. He was eventually turned back, but he spread Greek culture deep into the east and ushered in the Hellenistic period.

©Getty;Corbis;JoeCummings

Louis XIV

The Sun King chosen by God

Declared he was chosen by God to rule, and ensured that no one could challenge him

After inheriting the French throne at the age of four, Louis XIV spent a lifetime reaffirming his status as his nation's supreme ruler. By the time he died at the age of 76, he had ruled longer than any monarch in European history.

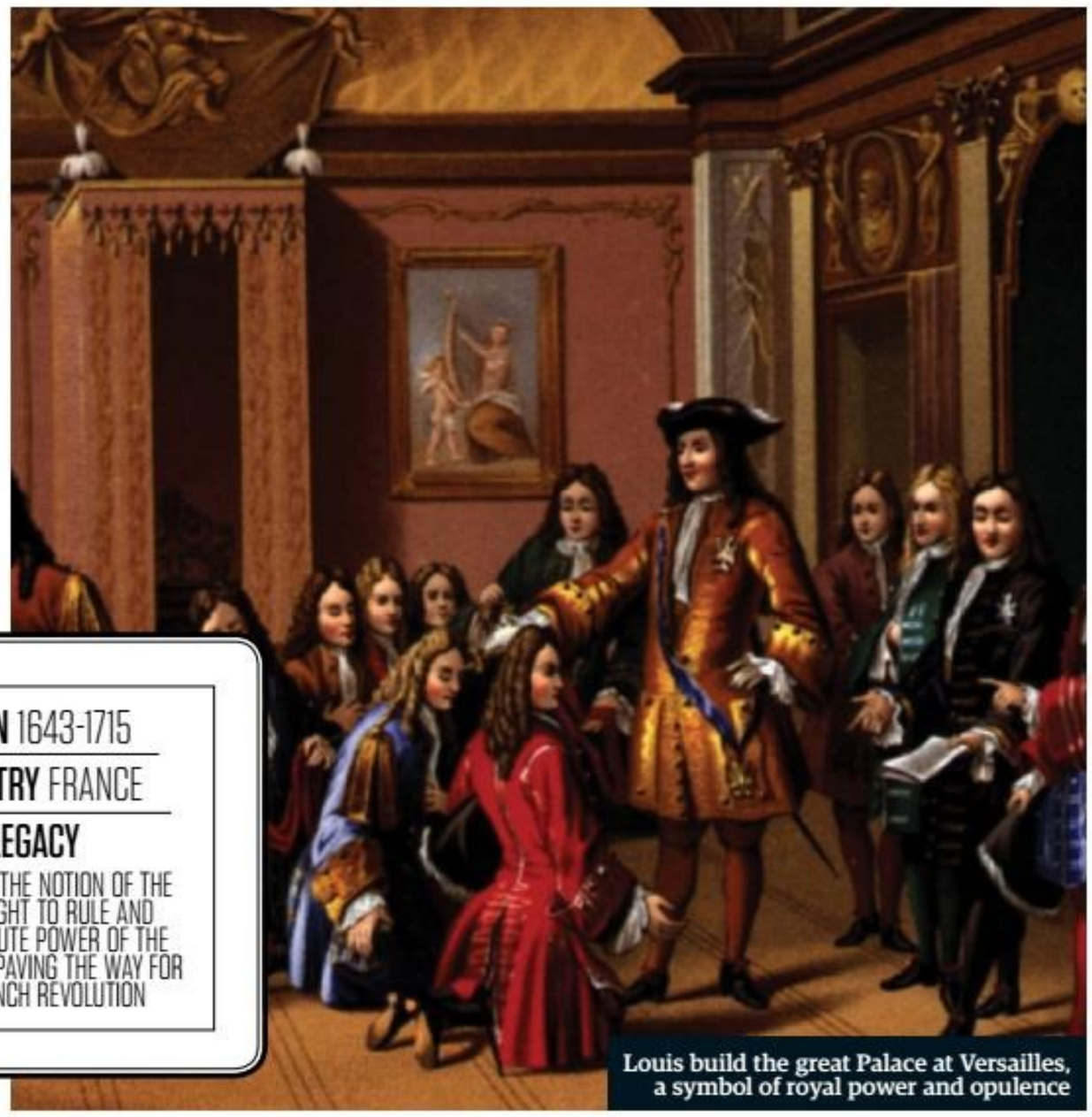
During the early years of his reign, the country was run by Louis' mother and his minister Cardinal Mazarin, during which time he saw the French people revolt against their rule, and the family was forced to flee Paris more than once. As the King, Louis promoted the idea of divine right and referred to himself as the 'Sun King'. He left Paris to build an enormous palace for himself at Versailles, which he encouraged the nobility to inhabit to avoid dissent. He revolutionised France's infrastructure, making the country more prosperous and easier to control. However, he spent much of his rule at war, and the final 30 years of his 72-year reign were spent in costly and unsuccessful conflict.

REIGN 1643-1715

COUNTRY FRANCE

LEGACY

PROMOTED THE NOTION OF THE DIVINE RIGHT TO RULE AND THE ABSOLUTE POWER OF THE MONARCHY, PAVING THE WAY FOR THE FRENCH REVOLUTION



Louis build the great Palace at Versailles, a symbol of royal power and opulence

The Gunpowder plot put paid to any concerns that James I had Catholic sympathies, whether they were correct or not

James I

First King of Great Britain

United England and Scotland, and believed that he had the Divine Right to do so

By the time James VI of Scotland took the throne of England, he had already been a monarch for 36 years. He was named King of Scotland at the age of one, and believed so firmly in the Divine Right of Kings that he wrote a book on the subject. When he came to England after the death of Elizabeth, I he had himself proclaimed the first king of Great Britain. Believing he knew exactly what he was doing, James would argue endlessly with Parliament over trivial matters, refusing to back down and lose face.

While many worried that James was too lenient on Catholics, his reaction to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 proved otherwise. He had authorised work on the King James Bible, the good book translated and altered to conform to the Church of England's beliefs. His extravagant spending angered politicians, while he lacked his predecessor Elizabeth's love for the people. By the time of his death, the seeds of the Civil War had already been sown.

REIGN 1567/1603-1625

COUNTRY GREAT BRITAIN

LEGACY

BROUGHT THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE RIGHT TO ENGLAND, AND WAS THE FIRST KING OF GREAT BRITAIN

Nebuchadnezzar II

Warrior king of the Babylonian Empire

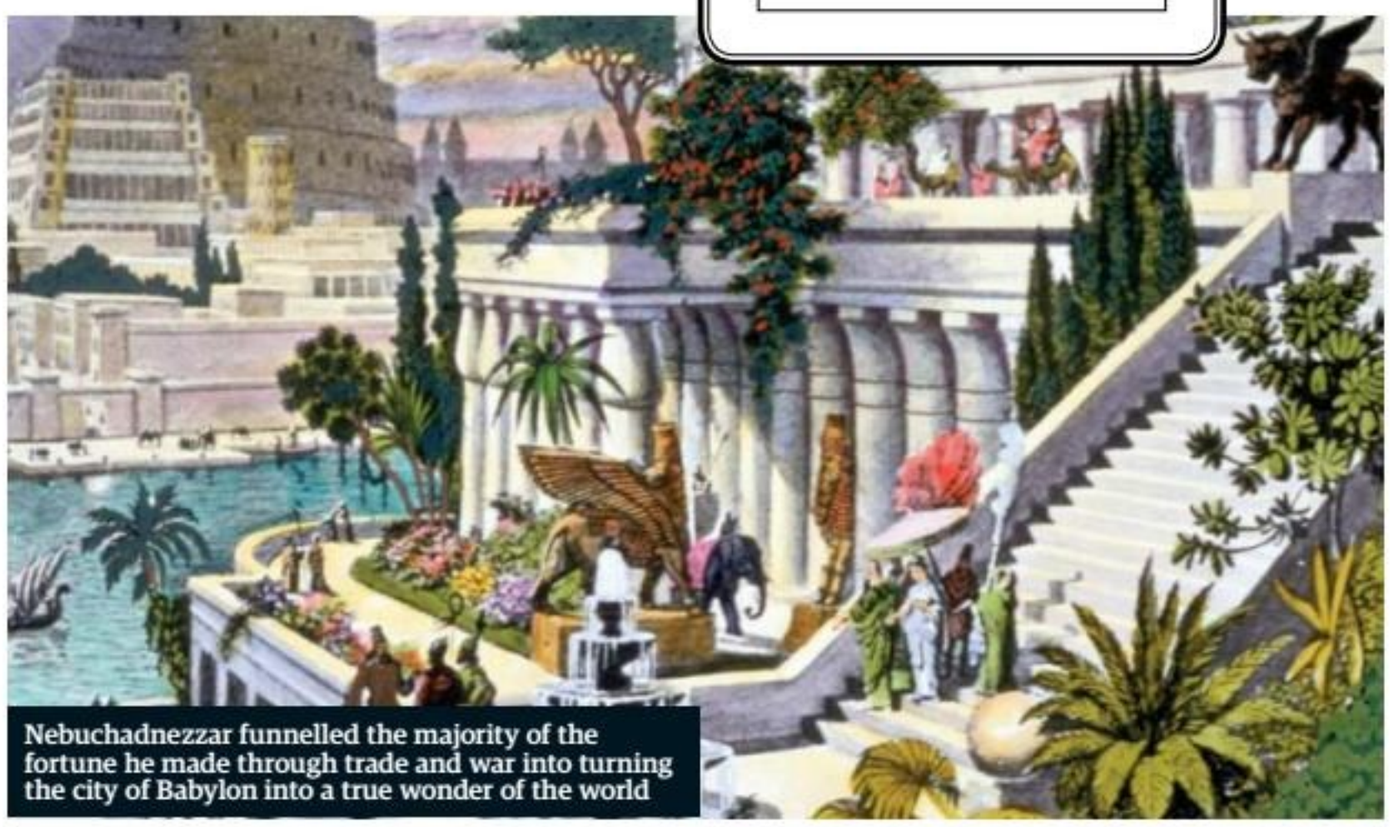
Created the Babylonian Empire, forming a state whose legend survives to this day

REIGN 605-562 BCE
COUNTRY BABYLON
LEGACY
TURNED BABYLON INTO AN EMPIRE AND WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EXILE OF THE JEWS

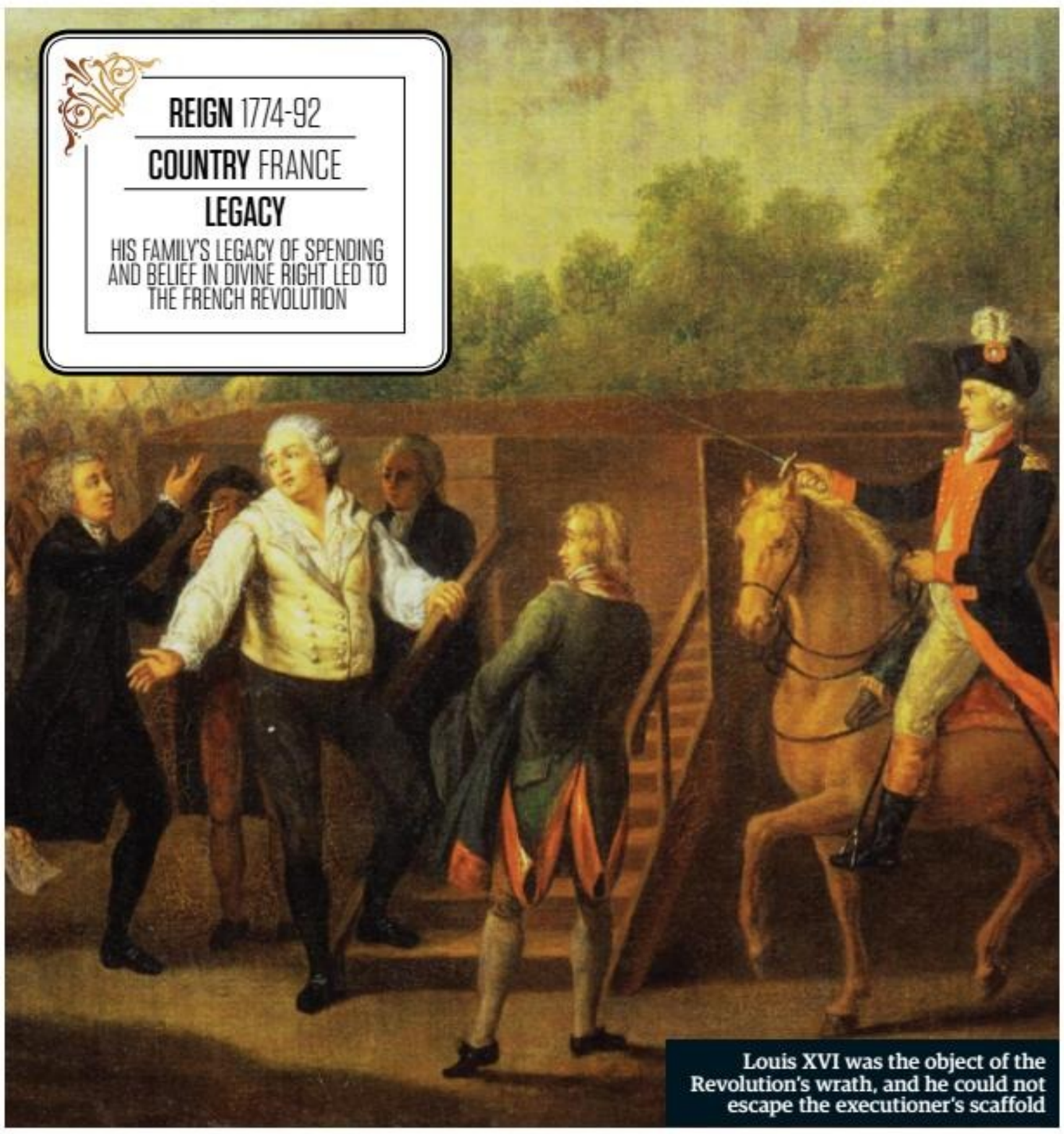
Ancient Babylon had at last found stability under the rule of Nabopolassar. With his son Nebuchadnezzar II, it would find glory. When the young man took power, he asked the gods that he be "satiated with splendour," and spent the rest of his reign making sure that this would be the case.

His father had secured independence from Assyria. Nebuchadnezzar fought the Egyptians, Palestinians and Syrians to create a Babylonian Empire. He built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and took control of the Mesopotamian trade routes to the Mediterranean, using the fortunes gained from his efforts to turn his city into a true wonder of the world. The walls had his name inscribed on them, while chariot races took place along their tops.

To many, Nebuchadnezzar will forever be remembered as the man who destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and deported many prominent Jews to Babylon. He is remembered in the Bible as an enemy of God.



Nebuchadnezzar funnelled the majority of the fortune he made through trade and war into turning the city of Babylon into a true wonder of the world



REIGN 1774-92
COUNTRY FRANCE
LEGACY
HIS FAMILY'S LEGACY OF SPENDING AND BELIEF IN DIVINE RIGHT LED TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Louis XVI was the object of the Revolution's wrath, and he could not escape the executioner's scaffold

Louis XVI

The French king who lost his head

The last in a line of profligate monarchs, Louis was executed for treason in the French Revolution

Louis XVI's reign was doomed from the start. After a succession of out-of-touch French kings who believed that they were chosen by God and an ever-worsening financial crisis, his attempts to continue that legacy led to revolution and his death.

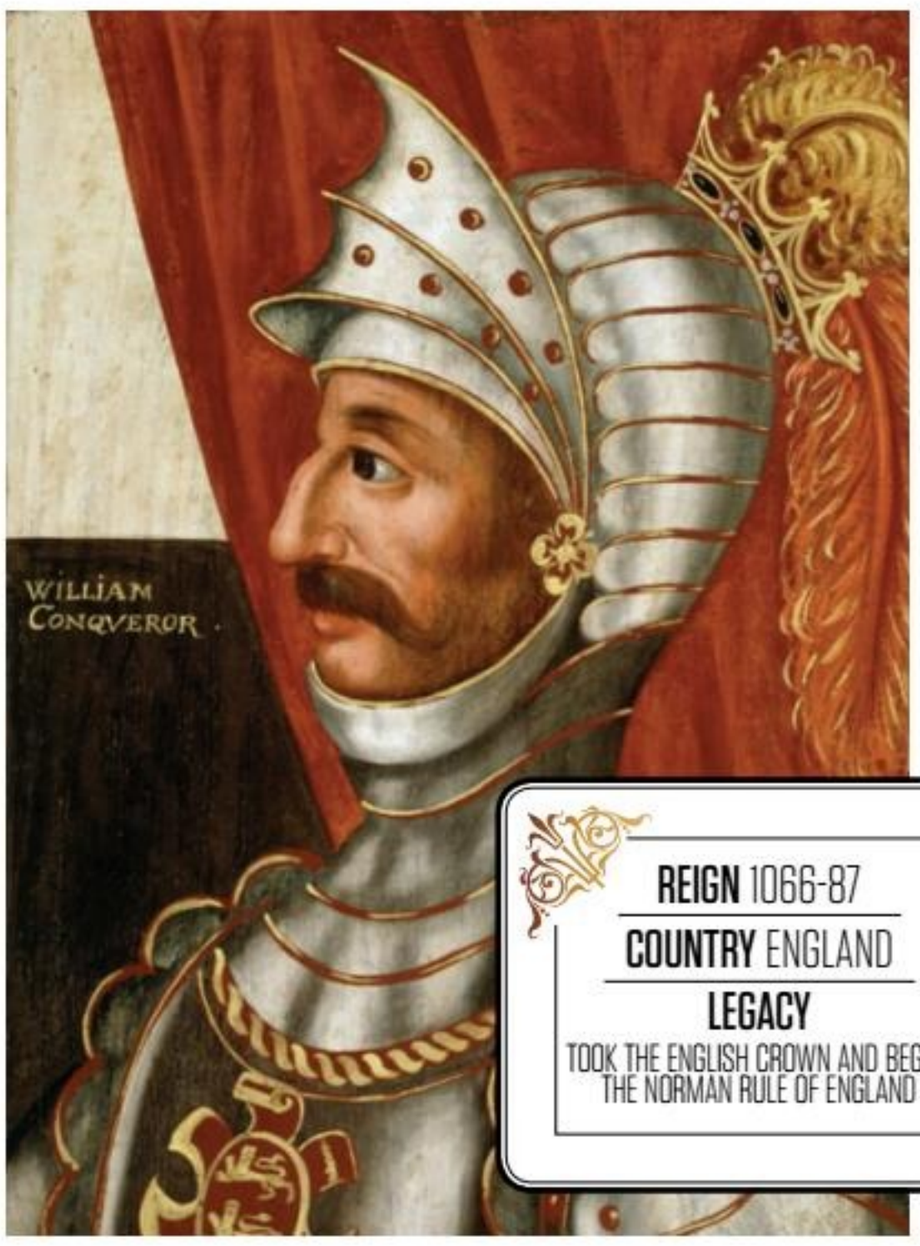
His marriage to Marie Antoinette was a political victory, but the (incorrect) image of her as an uncaring, ever-spending snob meant that she was unpopular with the populace. Careless spending and supporting the American War of Independence meant that France was on the verge of bankruptcy. In desperation, Louis called the 'States General' to raise taxes without giving Parliament any power. The political factions united in opposition, and the people supported them, storming the Bastille in 1789 and forcing the royal family to leave Versailles for Paris. When Louis and his family were caught trying to escape, a new constitutional monarchy was established in retaliation, but it wasn't long before France was declared a republic in September 1792. On 21 January 1793, Louis was executed for treason.

Henry V

The Shakespearean hero who put France to the sword

William Shakespeare wrote of a wayward prince who found his way, but Henry was always a committed politician and soldier. He argued with his father about how to rule but, on becoming king, he led two hugely successful military campaigns in France that would never be matched. His finest hour was at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, but he died after just nine years on the throne.

REIGN 1413-1422
COUNTRY ENGLAND
LEGACY
HIS MILITARY SUCCESSES IN FRANCE INSPIRED GENERATIONS OF ENGLISH KINGS TO TRY AND REPEAT THEM



William The Conqueror

The King who invaded England

The Duke of Normandy invaded England in 1066, and waited to face the recently crowned Harold at Hastings, stating that the crown had been promised to him. After a decisive victory, William took the English throne, secured borders and treaties with the Scottish and the Welsh, and ordered the creation of the *Domesday Book*. He brought England stability and a new royal line.

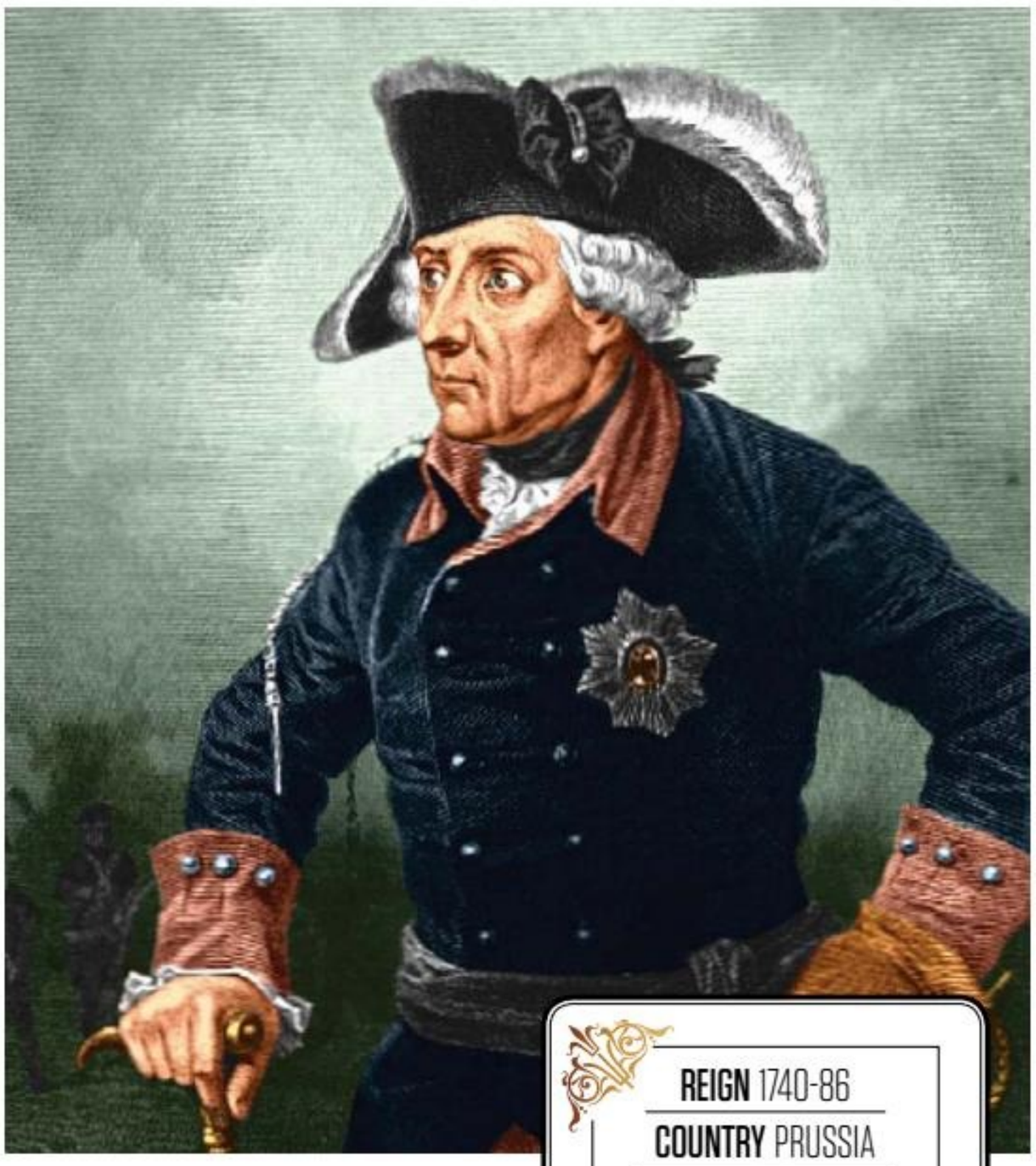
REIGN 1066-87
COUNTRY ENGLAND
LEGACY
TOOK THE ENGLISH CROWN AND BEGAN THE NORMAN RULE OF ENGLAND

Alfred The Great

Turned the tide against the Viking invasion

When Alfred became King of Wessex, England was the victim of persistent attack from Danish Vikings, who struck further and further south. He used guerrilla warfare against their troops, in the process forcing them to consider a treaty. By creating a strong base and defences, promoting literacy and justice, and creating a partition treaty in 886 CE, Alfred brought peace and prosperity.

REIGN 871-899 CE
COUNTRY WESSEX
LEGACY
BROUGHT PEACE AND PROGRESS TO ENGLAND



Frederick II Of Prussia

REIGN 1740-86
COUNTRY PRUSSIA
LEGACY
TURNED PRUSSIA INTO THE GREATEST MILITARY POWER IN EUROPE

Frederick turned Prussia into a military superpower

After an abusive childhood at the hands of his father, Frederick II went on to unite the disparate territories of the Prussian territories, using his military might and cunning to create one of Europe's great powers, even after defeat in the Seven Years' War. As significant as his military accomplishments were, his commitment to enlightened absolutism is just as important, with a rationalistic approach to religion and justice.

Gustav II Adolf Of Sweden

The saviour of Sweden

Gustav had inherited three international wars when he took the throne at the age of 16, but after a series of campaigns he made peace with Denmark, Poland and Russia and found a way to resolve the internal conflicts that beset Sweden. With the country at peace, he developed an infrastructure and bureaucracy that stabilised the nation, before entering the 30 Years War to claim territory in the Baltic.

REIGN 1611-32
COUNTRY SWEDEN
LEGACY
TURNED A SWEDEN IN CHAOS INTO A STABLE, PROSPEROUS NATION

John III Sobieski Of Poland-Lithuania

The soldier who became a king

Before he was king, John III was already a hero after leading the Polish military against the Swedes, Tartars and Cossacks. When the Ottomans advanced on Europe, he joined with Pope Leopold and led the glorious campaign to relieve the Holy Roman Empire's forces at the Battle of Vienna in 1683. He would never recapture that glory, but his victory against overwhelming odds was legendary.

REIGN 1674-96
COUNTRY
POLAND-LITHUANIA
LEGACY
HELD BACK THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Edward I

United England by any means necessary

Edward was determined to create a unified England that recognised him as its ruler. When he returned from the Crusades after his father's death, he invaded Wales twice to subdue rebel forces and brought it under English rule, creating new legal and trade systems to ensure funds for his brutal campaigns. His final years were spent fighting the Scottish uprisings with shockingly brutal methods.

REIGN 1274-1307
COUNTRY ENGLAND
LEGACY
A LEGACY OF BRUTAL CONFLICT IN WALES AND SCOTLAND

Charles V

Faced the end of an empire

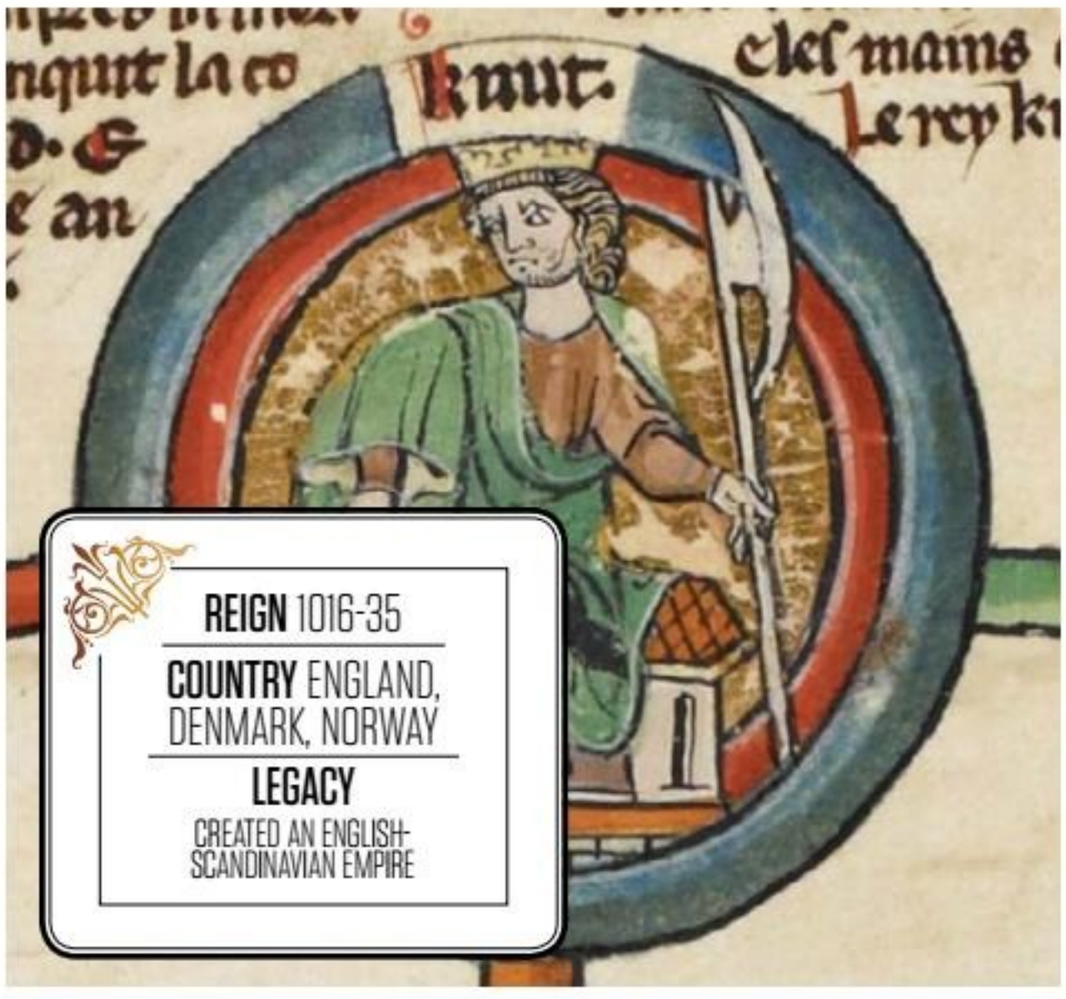
Charles became Holy Roman Emperor while the Protestant Reformation was taking place in 1519. For the majority of his reign he allowed religious freedom, provided Protestants fought with him against France and the rising Ottoman threat in the East. Riches found in the Americas weren't enough to keep his campaigns going, however, and much of his empire in Europe was lost. He finally abdicated in favour of his son.

REIGN 1516-56
COUNTRY SPAIN
LEGACY
FOUGHT OFF THE OTTOMAN INVASION, BUT SAW HIS EMPIRE CRUMBLE

Cnut The Great

The king who made England part of a bigger world

The Viking king who told the tide to turn back understood that the power of a king is fleeting. However, he amassed plenty in his lifetime, having invaded England and taken the crown in 1017. He divided the country into kingdoms to ensure peace, and sent his Danish soldiers back home, finally creating a huge empire by conquering Norway in 1025.



REIGN 1016-35
COUNTRY ENGLAND, DENMARK, NORWAY
LEGACY
CREATED AN ENGLISH-SCANDINAVIAN EMPIRE

Mbande Nzinga

The African queen who held off the Portuguese

Mbande Nzinga was born into conflict with the Portuguese, who were raiding the Ndongo territory for slaves. When her cruel brother asked for help while negotiating with them, she secured a treaty and had him killed. Having taken power, she cancelled the treaty when it became clear that the Portuguese had broken it. Between 1639 and 1648 she held back her enemies, finally agreeing to a treaty that kept her in power.

REIGN 1623-63

COUNTRY THE NDONGO (ANGOLA)

LEGACY

FOUGHT OFF PORTUGUESE SLAVE TRADERS AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS

REIGN 1154-1204

COUNTRY ENGLAND

LEGACY

SURVIVED HER HUSBAND TO BE A CRUCIAL PART OF HER SONS' RULE

Eleanor Of Aquitaine

The queen who defied her king to bring stability

The ambitious Eleanor made Henry of Anjou her second husband, who became the King of England. She assisted her children with a rebellion attempt in 1173, and ensured that her favourite son Richard's throne was kept safe during his time in the Crusades. She kept his kingdom running smoothly, negotiating his wedding and release from prison, and assisted her son John when he became king.

REIGN 1560-89

COUNTRY FRANCE

LEGACY

BRUTALLY ATTEMPTED TO CRUSH THE WARS OF RELIGION TO KEEP HER SONS ON THE THRONE

Catherine De' Medici

France's regent during the Wars of Religion

Catherine stepped into power in 1560 when her husband Henry II of France – and her eldest son Francis – died in quick succession. As regent for her ten-year-old son Charles, she kept power grabs at bay from the nobility and used increasingly violent methods to quell the French Wars of Religion, which culminated in her involvement in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Her influence continued throughout the reign of her son Henry.

REIGN 1936-52
COUNTRY ENGLAND
LEGACY
PROVIDING THE VOICE OF LEADERSHIP DURING CONFLICT

George VI

Refused to leave London during World War II

Following his brother's abdication, the shy, awkward George VI took the crown shortly before World War II broke out. He remained in Buckingham Palace during the Blitz and visited bombed homes, as well as meeting the troops at home and abroad after D-Day. Ever conscious of the military's efforts, he created the George Cross and the George Medal.

Charles II

The Restoration King

After Parliament's rule following the Civil War, Charles II was invited to return to power in 1660. He encouraged tolerance (after punishing those who had executed his father) and promoted peace with France and international trade in America and India. He ruled during the Great Fire and the Great Plague, but is better known for his mistresses, his belief in Catholicism and conflicts with Parliament.

REIGN 1660-85
COUNTRY ENGLAND
LEGACY
RESTORED ENGLAND TO A MONARCHY AND RETURNED THE MONARCHY TO ITS OLD WAYS

Charles IV

The Holy Roman politician

When Charles was born, the kingdom he stood to inherit was that of Luxembourg and Bohemia. When he died, he was the Holy Roman Emperor, with Italy, Germany and Lombardy owing fealty to him. He preferred to use his skills as a politician to gain power, promoting the arts, sciences, charities and church building, as well as amassing a staggering empire in a (mostly) peaceful manner.

REIGN 1346-78
COUNTRY HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE
LEGACY
USED TREATIES AND NEGOTIATIONS TO GAIN POWER OVER THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

REIGN 1696-1725
COUNTRY RUSSIA
LEGACY
FORCED RUSSIA TO BECOME A MODERN STATE

Peter I

The Russian reformer

Peter took control of a Russia in tatters and began a period of modernisation. He promoted education and the sciences to improve industry and looked to Western methods to strengthen his navy and bring Russian territories together, as well as bringing the church under his control and modernising the alphabet. He was cruel and unpopular, but dragged Russia into the modern age.

REIGN 1902-53
COUNTRY SAUDI ARABIA
LEGACY
CREATED SAUDI ARABIA AND BEGAN THEIR OIL INDUSTRY

Ibn Saud

The father of Saudi Arabia

Ibn Saud began his journey to power by reclaiming his father's territory in central Arabia in a bloody coup. He fought off Turkish forces and encouraged religious fanaticism to support his rule as he expanded his territory through conquest of his Arab rivals. He founded the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and brokered the first oil deals of the region, changing its fortunes forever.

REIGN 1849-78
COUNTRY ITALY
LEGACY
RULED OVER THE FIRST UNITED KINGDOM OF ITALY

Victor Emmanuel II

The Sardinian who united Italy

After inheriting a failed war with Austria, Victor paid his way out of the conflict and turned the kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont into something much greater. With the help of Count Cavour and Garibaldi, the Piedmontese army took territory from Prussia and France to create the first united Italy.

REIGN 522-486 BCE
COUNTRY PERSIA
LEGACY
EXPANDED AND CONSOLIDATED THE PERSIAN EMPIRE AND TURNED IT INTO A GREAT, ENLIGHTENED AND PROSPEROUS KINGDOM

King Darius The Great

The Persian architect

Darius took power through violence and cunning. Once on the throne, it was largely through this second attribute that he turned Persia into a true empire. He divided his kingdom into 'satrapies', ordered the construction of roads, promoted trade, ordered a single currency and official language and encouraged religious tolerance. Under his guidance the Persian Empire became a shining beacon of prosperity and enlightenment.

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1370 – 1330 BCE

Nefertiti

Her limestone bust is recognised the world over, and her chiselled features and perfect proportions have come to epitomise our ideas of beauty. But who was the woman behind the masterpiece?

On 6 December 1912, an Egyptian workman digging along the banks of the River Nile unearthed one of the most precious treasures in the history of Egyptology. The man was one of many working on the excavation of an ancient sculptor's workshop, a dig overseen by German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt. As he felt the knowing jolt of his pick against hard stone, he brushed away the earth to reveal the distinctive colours of ancient paintwork, and immediately called for his superior. Borchardt recalls: "The tools were put aside and the hands were now used," revealing the slender neck of a limestone bust buried upside down in the dirt. Digging deeper, they revealed a pair of full, red lips; a dramatic, sloping nose; almond eyes; and dark, arching eyebrows. Finally, they uncovered a huge cylindrical crown, one that had only been seen before in the few existing depictions of one ancient Egyptian: Queen Nefertiti.

Since its discovery, the bust has become one of the most visited and most iconic artefacts of the ancient kingdom. Yet it remains one of the most elusive. Following their reign, Nefertiti and her husband Pharaoh Akhenaten were virtually wiped from Egypt's historical records – their faces chiselled away from stone reliefs, their names scratched out from inscriptions. To add to the mystery, all references to Nefertiti vanished completely in about the 12th year of Akhenaten's reign, with no mention of her made thereafter. What had they done to instil such hatred in their people? And why did Nefertiti suddenly disappear? It is only now, more than 3,000 years after their deaths, that the answers are beginning to resurface.

> Following their reign, Nefertiti and her husband were wiped from Egypt's historical records

The truth about Nefertiti's parentage is uncertain, but it is likely she was born outside of the royal family: possibly the daughter of a court vizier, or a Mittani princess sent to unite two kingdoms. What we do know is that her face was one of timeless beauty – her name means 'the beautiful one has come' – and she would have been a desirable match for the young Egyptian prince, then known as Amenhotep. The pair were married in their mid teens, had their first child shortly after, and ascended the throne around 1351 BCE. What is known of their early reign is sketchy, but archaeologists have deduced that throughout the 18th Dynasty, a cult of the god Amun had grown incredibly powerful, so much so that by the time Amenhotep was crowned, the cult's priests were almost as powerful as the pharaoh himself.

Egypt's female pharaohs

Most of the ancient rulers were men, but a few women became the empire's most powerful individuals

Sobekneferu

Sobekneferu was the first female pharaoh. When her brother died without leaving a male heir, Sobekneferu ascended the throne. Very little else is known about her, but some believe that she is the Egyptian princess who rescued Moses from the reeds.

Nitocris

The Greek historian Heroditus listed Nitocris as the last pharaoh of the Sixth Dynasty. She is believed to have killed her brother's murderers by inviting them to a banquet in an underground chamber and flooding the room with water from the Nile.

Hatshepsut

Hatshepsut is considered to be one of Egypt's most successful pharaohs. She established several important trade routes, which led to a huge growth in the nation's wealth and also commissioned hundreds of building projects.

Twosret

This woman came to the throne after her young stepson, with who she was co-regent, died. She ruled during a turbulent time and it is likely that she was overthrown from power during a civil war.

Cleopatra

Perhaps the most famous female pharaoh in Egypt's history, Cleopatra is infamous for her liaisons with several important Roman politicians, and is believed to have committed suicide after Mark Antony's death.

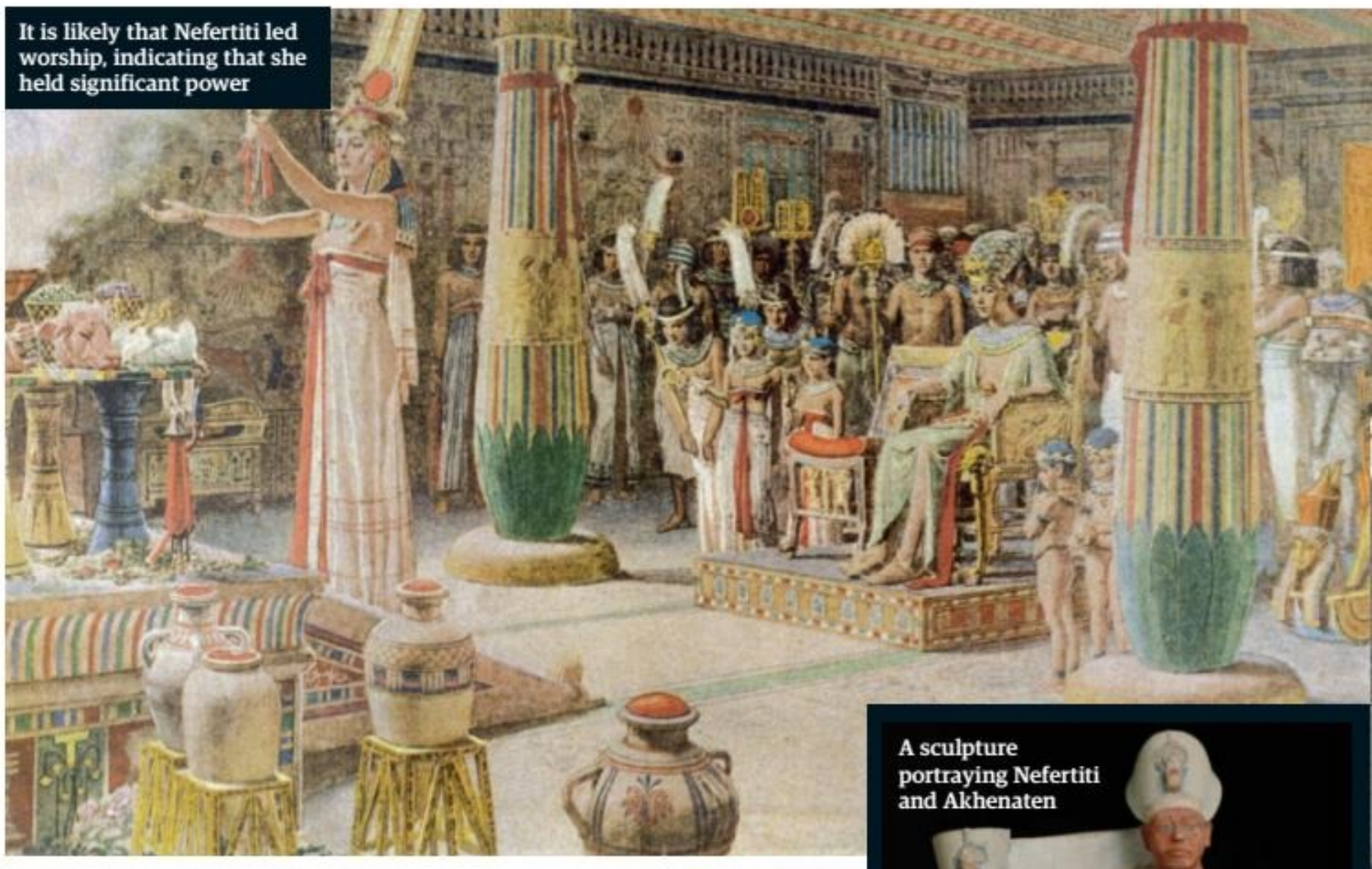
The ruins of Amarna as seen today, surrounded by inhospitable cliffs

But in the fifth year of Amenhotep's reign, something extraordinary happened. The pharaoh changed his name to Akhenaten, plundered and closed down the temples and threw the priests out of office. After thousands of years of polytheism, he and Nefertiti declared that there was now only one true god: Aten, the sun-disc. And the only way to reach this god was through the pharaoh himself. Akhenaten then led a mass exodus from the ancient capital of Thebes and set about building a new city in the middle of the desert, which he called 'Amarna'. This was to be the new centre of the Ancient Egyptian empire. The city was surrounded on three sides by inhospitable cliffs - a natural defence against enemies of the crown. The young pharaoh knew that his actions had not been popular, and the rumblings of unrest could be felt across the kingdom.

> After millennia of polytheism, they declared that there was now only one god, Aten, and the only way to reach Him was through the pharaoh

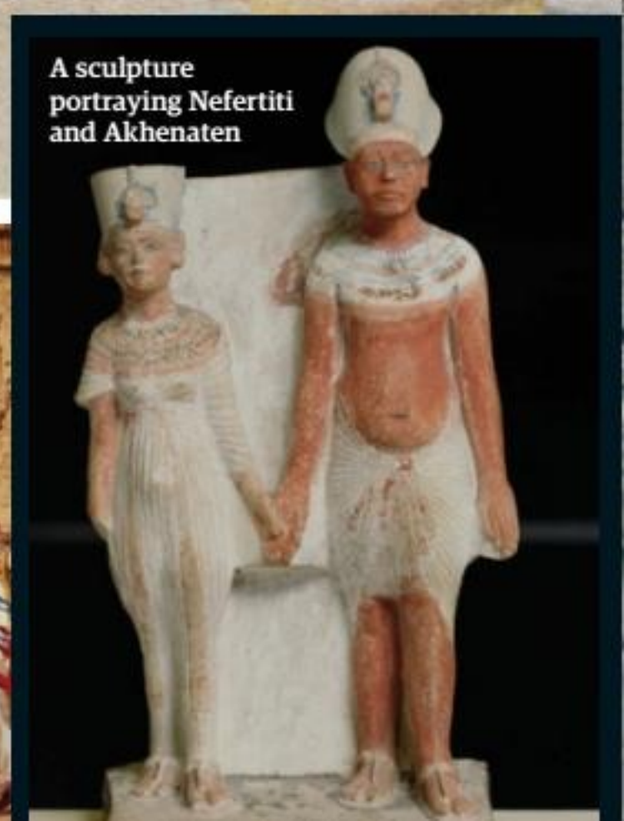
With this religious revolution also came a cultural one. Egyptian art, which before had been stiff and formal, became much more naturalistic. Depictions of Akhenaten took on a far more feminine shape, with rounded hips and a prominent chest. Scenes depicting the royal family became more intimate, showing the couple kissing and bouncing their children on their knees. But what is perhaps most extraordinary about the art of Amarna is the way Queen Nefertiti was portrayed. Reliefs and statues show Nefertiti chariot racing, smiting enemies and even leading worship - roles that before had always been reserved for the pharaoh. During the first five years of their reign, she appeared in reliefs almost twice as often as her husband, and is often shown as being of equal size to him, suggesting that Nefertiti was far more powerful than the wives of the pharaohs before her.

However, it wasn't long before this period of rich culture and peace came to an abrupt end. Akhenaten had exhausted nearly all of his resources in building his new city and the nation was on the brink of bankruptcy. Large parts of the Egyptian empire had fallen under the control of the expanding Hittite kingdom, after the pharaoh had refused to listen to the advice of his generals and send military enforcements to the north. Not only was there an economic crisis, but the spiritual crisis that had been bubbling beneath the surface was ready to explode. The pharaoh's new religion

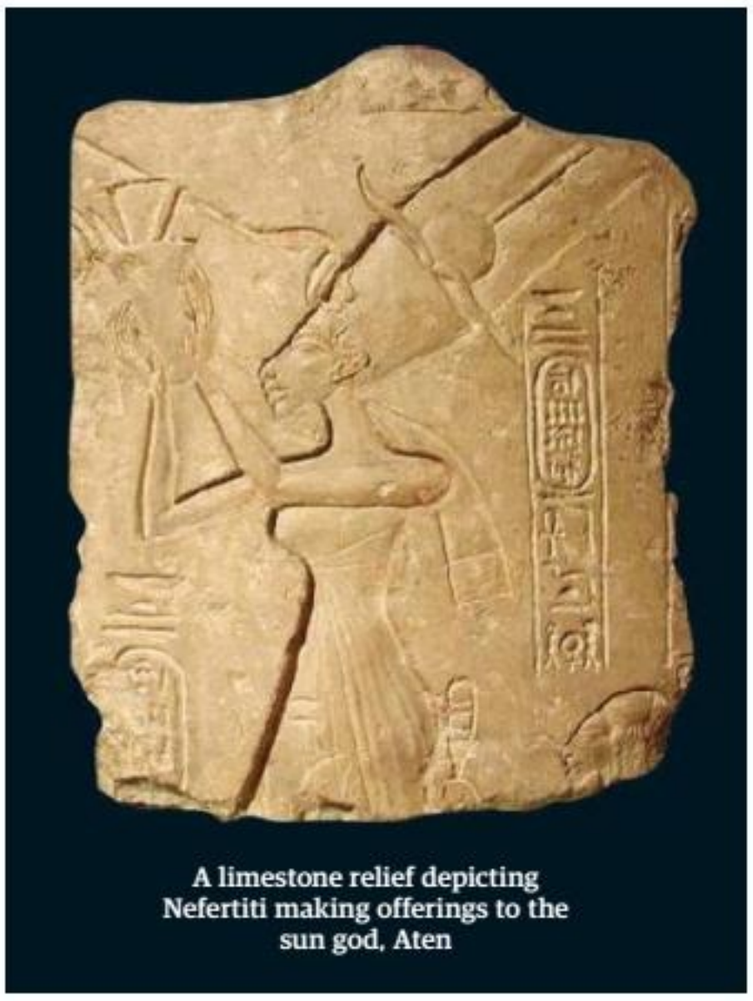


It is likely that Nefertiti led worship, indicating that she held significant power

Amarna art depicts Nefertiti racing chariots and smiting enemies



A sculpture portraying Nefertiti and Akhenaten



A limestone relief depicting Nefertiti making offerings to the sun god, Aten

Nefertiti: the first woman to be airbrushed?

CT scans of the famous bust have revealed that Nefertiti may not have been as beautiful as was first believed. Scientists have been able to analyse the layers of stucco below the outer one and have discovered that the original model had less prominent cheekbones, a slight bump on the ridge of the nose and even wrinkles around the mouth and cheeks. Just like modern airbrushing, it is likely that the queen's sculpture was altered to adhere to contemporary ideas of beauty.

had destroyed all the ancient traditions that the Egyptians held so dear, and very few were prepared to let go of their trusted and much-loved gods. Revolts broke out across the nation, spurred on by the bitter priests and military officials who were desperate to take back the powers that had been so ruthlessly stolen from them. By the time of his death around 1334 BCE, Akhenaten's country was a broken one.

It is unlikely that these revolts came as a surprise, but what the Egyptians could never have predicted was the disappearance of Nefertiti in the 12th year of her husband's reign. Whereas before her face had adorned the walls of temples and palaces, from the year 1339 BCE, all records and depictions of her stopped being made. What had happened to the queen - the woman the pharaoh seemed to worship? Some historians believe that she fell out of favour, perhaps because she was unable to bear Akhenaten the son he so desperately wanted. Others believe she died, a victim, perhaps, of the flu epidemic that was plaguing the country, or even a jealous member of Akhenaten's harem.

But one piece of art, known as the *Coregency Stela*, suggests that Nefertiti didn't disappear at all, rather that she became someone else; someone far more powerful. In the piece, Nefertiti and Akhenaten are depicted with one of their daughters, but Nefertiti's name has been chiselled out and replaced with a different one - 'Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten'. This was the name of Akenhaten's co-regent, who was crowned around the same time that Nefertiti's name disappeared from history. Could Nefertiti have taken on a new name and become her husband's co-regent? And if so, could this explain the identity of the mysterious pharaoh who came to power after the death of Akhenaten?

These are questions that we will likely never know the answer to, as in the years following his death, nearly all evidence of Akhenaten's reign was destroyed by the people he had so inherently wounded. Deemed a heretic, his name was scratched from the walls of the temples and depictions of the beautiful Nefertiti mutilated with chisels. But Akhenaten's legacy lived on in the form of a son, the identity of who's mother is still contested. The boy was called Tutankhaten, meaning 'the living image of Aten', and he succeeded to the throne when he was about nine years old. Despite his tender age, he immediately set about reversing the changes made during his father's reign. Amarna was abandoned and fell into ruin, the old gods were brought back from the dead and the priests of Amun were reinstated. But there remained one remnant of the old religion, one that couldn't be destroyed with a hammer or chisel. The remnant was the boy's name. Just like his father and stepmother before him, Tutankhaten gave himself a new name, a name that would honour the glory of Amun and the gods that his people loved so dearly. It was one that thousands of years later would be pasted across newsstands and known to people in every corner of the globe. The name was Tutankhamun.

Images of the royal family were more intimate then ever seen before

The search for Nefertiti

Could the female mummy discovered in tomb KV35 in 1898 be that of the famous Egyptian queen?

Since the discovery of Nefertiti's bust, archaeologists have scoured the Egyptian desert in search of her resting place. Though no formal identification has been made, one Egyptologist believes she has found Nefertiti's mummy in the tomb of Amenhotep II, the great grandfather of Akhenaten.

The mummy, known as 'The Younger Lady', was discovered buried alongside Queen Tiye, Akhenaten's mother, and a young boy, possibly his brother, back in 1898. The discoverer, Victor Loret, originally believed the mummy to be male, but a closer inspection by anatomist Dr Grafton Elliot Smith Tests concluded that it was a woman. The room containing the mummies was then sealed, and had been all but forgotten until 1993, when Egyptologist Joann Fletcher stumbled across one unlikely piece of evidence.

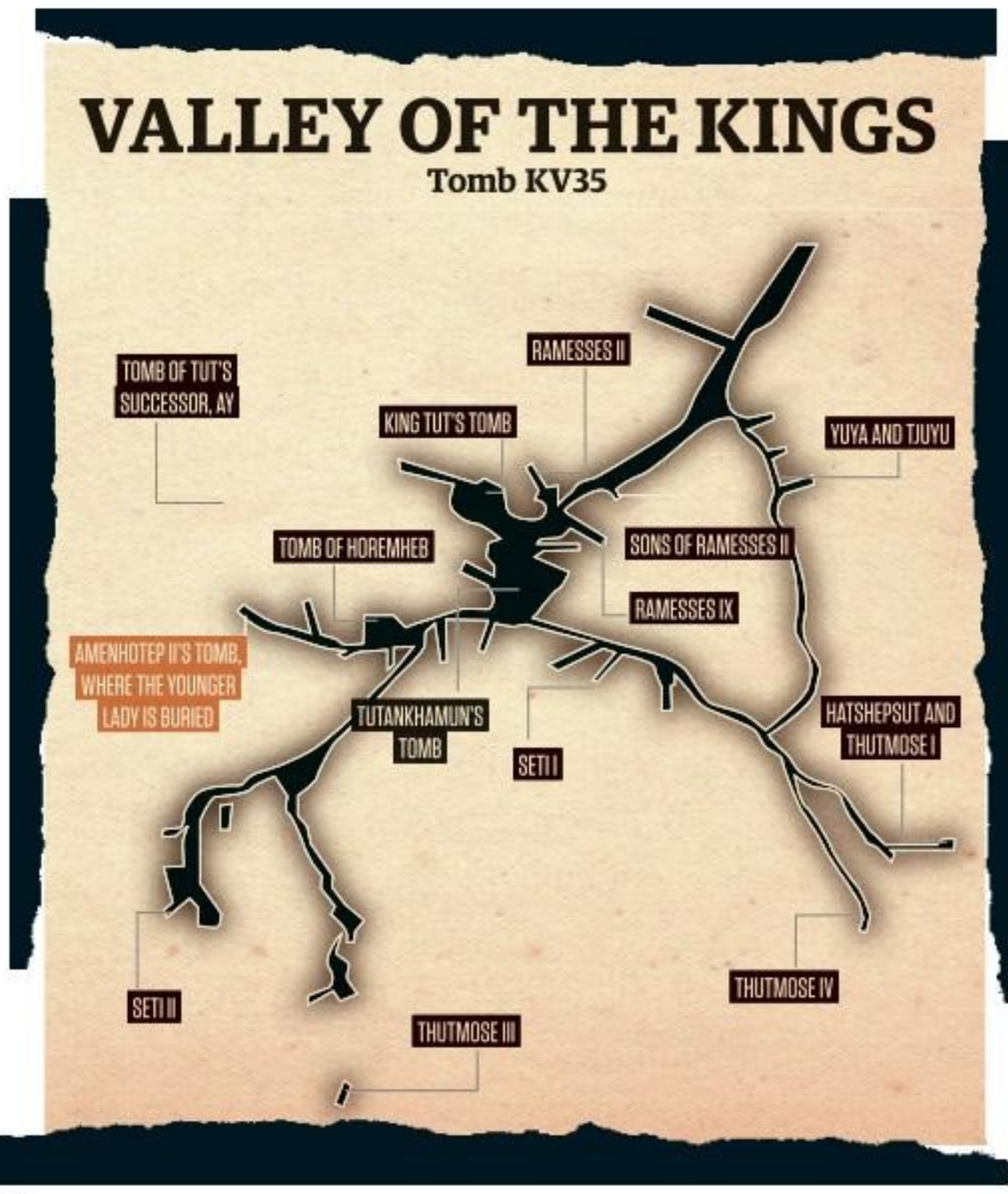
Joann, who at the time was completing a PhD in ancient Egyptian hair, came across a wig in the Cairo Museum that was in the Nubian style – a style favoured by royal women in Akhenaten's court, and particularly by Nefertiti. The wig had been discovered in tomb KV35 – the resting place of the 18th Dynasty pharaoh Amenhotep II. Intrigued as to the ownership of the wig, Joann requested for the sealed chamber to be re-opened.

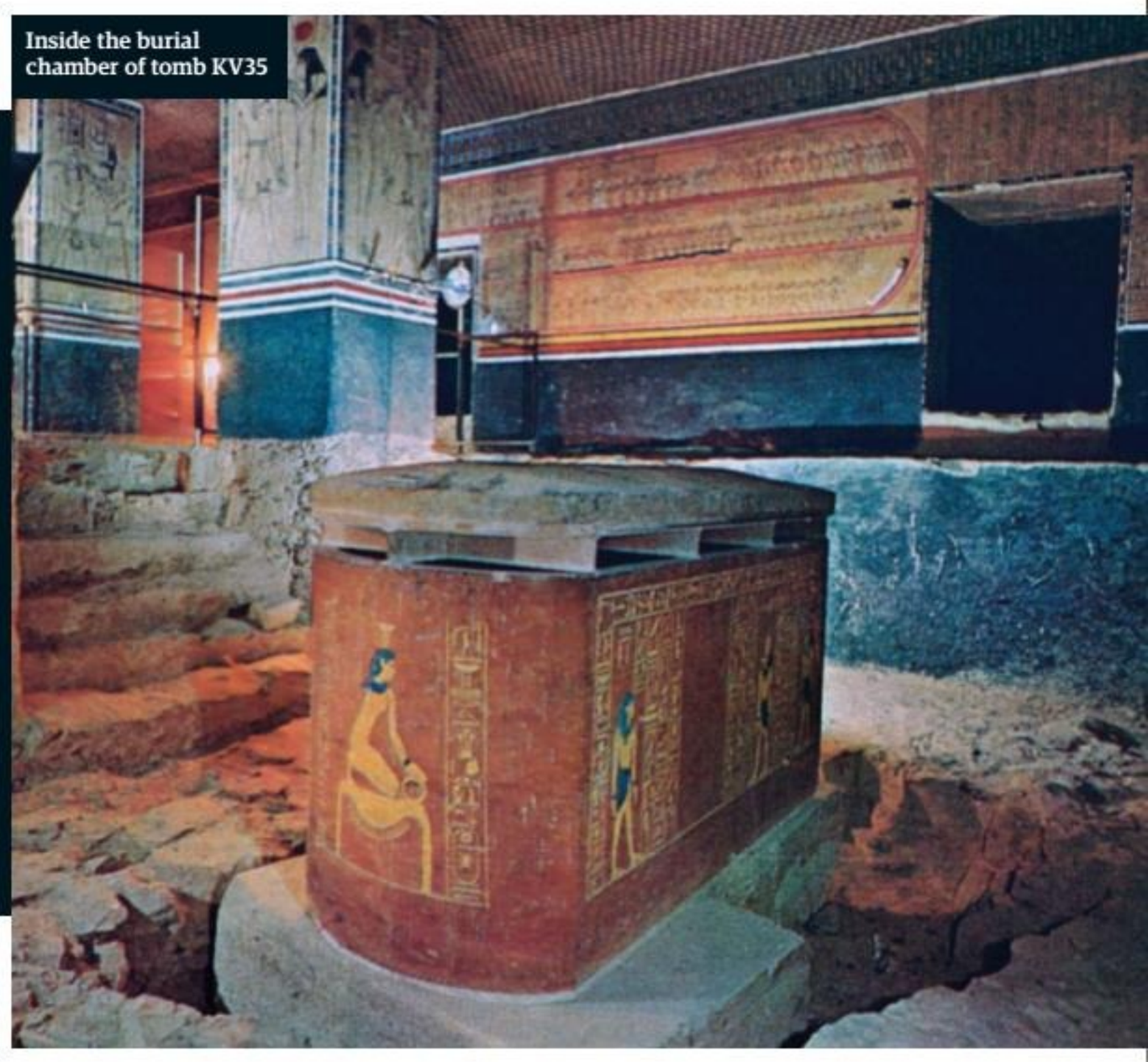
A wall painting showing Akhenaten and Nefertiti with their young family

What she discovered within the room was curious to say the least. The only mummy to whom the wig could viably belong was that of the Younger Lady, whose head had been shaved. This lack of hair emphasised a remarkably long neck – one all too familiar to an Egyptologist who had dedicated years to the study of Egypt's Amarna period. Further inspections led to the conclusion that this mummy was indeed a woman, and one who had died in her twenties or thirties – an age that, should she have survived her husband as the evidence has suggested, would fit that of Nefertiti.

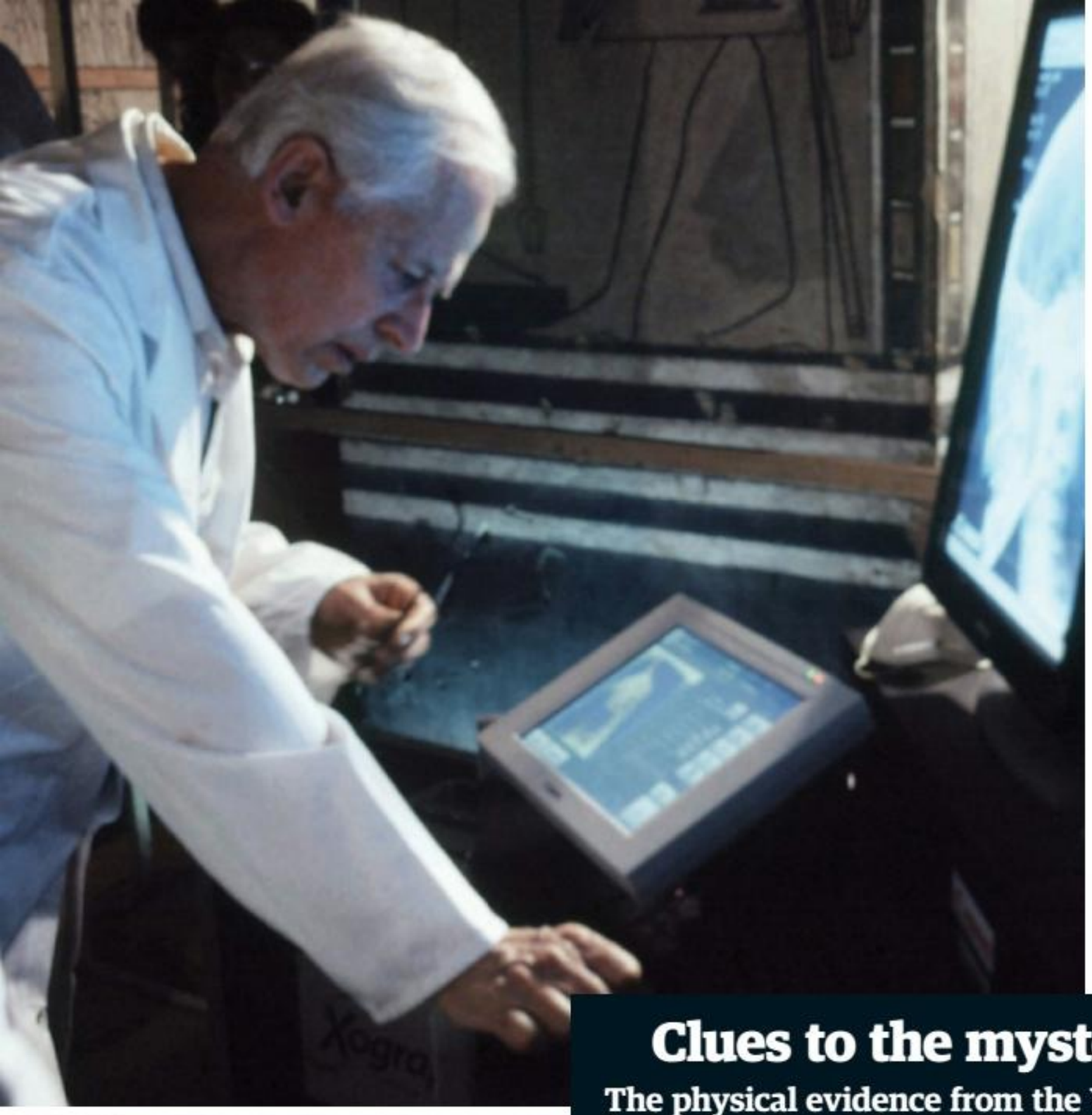
But what was perhaps most intriguing about the Younger Lady was the damage that had been inflicted upon the mummy shortly after its burial. The lower half of the mummy's face was violently and completely smashed in – a punishment worse than death if ancient traditions were to be believed. By destroying the mummy's mouth, the spirit of the dead would be unable to speak its name at the doors of the afterlife, condemning it to an eternity of damnation. The mummy's right arm had also been broken off, and what appeared to be its detached and outstretched limb was placed beside it. But closer inspection revealed that this bodiless arm belonged to someone else entirely – it had been mummified in a different way, and the measurements did not match those of the Younger Lady. In what was to become an astonishing discovery, another arm was found hidden beneath the wrappings of Queen Tiye's mummy. Unlike the first arm, this arm was bent at the elbow and its hand was clasped, indicating that it had been holding a sceptre – the sign of a pharaoh. And it fit the Younger Lady perfectly. Whoever had broken off this arm had clearly wanted to destroy all evidence of this woman's power, and Nefertiti's heresy would have been an understandable motivation for the desecration of a grave.

The claim that the Younger Lady is indeed Nefertiti is one that has been met with strong contention, and is a claim that may never be resolved. But it's hard to deny that the evidence all points to one very clear conclusion.





Inside the burial chamber of tomb KV35



Joann Fletcher examining the mummy of the Younger Lady

Clues to the mystery

The physical evidence from the Younger Lady all point to the same conclusion...

Arm
The right arm has been broken off, but a detached forearm was found in the tomb that is bent at the elbow and clasping a long-vanished sceptre – the sign of a pharaoh.

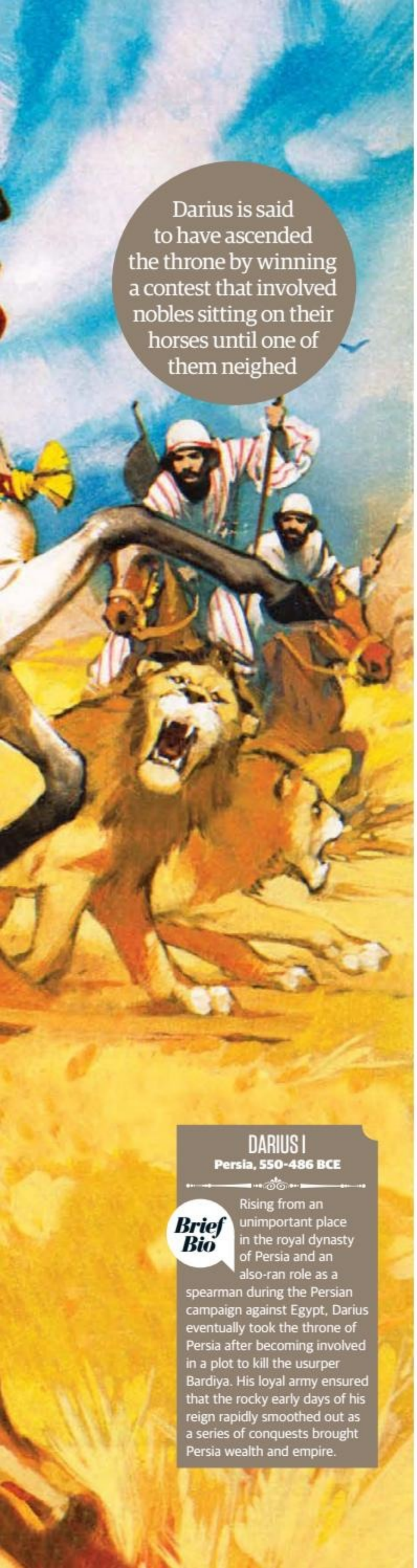
Head
The mummy's head is shaved, originally leading archaeologists to conclude that it is male. However, a woman's wig was found buried alongside the mummy, in a style that was especially popular in Akhenaten's court.

Brow
There is a clear impression of a tight-fitting brow-band – something that would have been needed to support a heavy crown.

Face
The lower half of the face has been smashed in, most likely by grave robbers shortly after the woman's burial. According to ancient Egyptian religion, this would have prevented her spirit from speaking its name, thus preventing her from entering the afterlife. The woman had clearly done something to anger her ancestors.

Ears
The mummy has two piercings in her left ear, which was unusual in Ancient Egypt. However, depictions of Nefertiti show her with a double piercing.

Beads
Several loose beads have been found on the mummy's chest, left over from the necklace she would have worn before it was stolen. These have been identified as Nefer beads: the same beads on Nefertiti's famous bust.


Darius is said to have ascended the throne by winning a contest that involved nobles sitting on their horses until one of them neighed

550 – 486 BCE

King Darius I

Ruling the vast Persian Achaemenid Empire at its height, Darius I became world-renowned for his unstoppable military might, impressive construction prowess and an astute ability to manage his realm's finances

What would you do if you inherited one of the largest and most powerful empires the world had ever seen? Well, if you were Darius I, the third king of the mighty Persian Empire, you would spend your reign making it even better, transforming its economy and embarking on a series of military campaigns that would lead you to earn the title of Darius the Great.

However, Darius the Great didn't begin his life as a figure destined for greatness, being merely the eldest of five sons of Hystaspes, a member of the Persian royal house that served under King Cyrus and King Cambyses II. According to the account of Herodotus, dubbed the "Father of History" who details the Persian Empire in his *Histories*, Darius was a youth 'of no consequence at the time' and ended up nothing more than spearman in the army of Cambyses II during the Empire's Egyptian conquest. Later Darius would rise to become the personal lancer of Cambyses II and there it would seem his role in history could have ended, a mere footnote in an epic age.

All this would change in a radical series of events that, oddly enough, would begin with a dream. Following Cambyses being made King of Persia by his father Cyrus, and Darius ascending to Cambyses' side as his personal lancer, Cyrus suddenly had a dream while he was away at war in which a vision of Darius equipped with wings

DARIUS I
Persia, 550-486 BCE

Brief Bio

Rising from an unimportant place in the royal dynasty of Persia and an also-ran role as a spearman during the Persian campaign against Egypt, Darius eventually took the throne of Persia after becoming involved in a plot to kill the usurper Bardiya. His loyal army ensured that the rocky early days of his reign rapidly smoothed out as a series of conquests brought Persia wealth and empire.

stood astride Europe and Asia. Upon waking, Cyrus decided that the dream was a warning that he and his son's empire was in danger and that Darius was forming plans to overthrow Cambyses. Fearing for his son's life, Cyrus sent Darius' father Hystaspes back to court to watch over his son strictly until he returned.

Returning to court, Hystaspes could not find any treasonable intentions in Darius during the time Cambyses remained king. Cambyses II's reign was indeed cut short, but rather than by Darius, a man who may or may not have been his brother, Bardiya, seized the throne for himself. According to the accounts of Darius' life, Cambyses attempted to march against Bardiya, but ended up committing suicide. Other accounts state that Cambyses died from a stab wound that turned gangrenous. Either way, Cyrus's fears had become reality, with Cambyses falling from power and the Persian Empire temporarily falling into chaos.

Darius, now freed from his role as lance-bearer to Cambyses, joined with various other noblemen from Persia who were against the usurper's rule and in September 522 BCE succeeded in a plot to kill the new king in the fortress of Sikayauvati. While the death of the usurper king ended months of chaos and uncertainty, the throne of the world's greatest empire was now vacant and with no obvious successor. What happens next is debated greatly among historians, with various different accounts describing the how Darius ascended the throne – some more bizarre than others. However, what all the accounts agree on is that the following morning Darius was King of Persia.

Darius was soon crowned at Pasargadae and afterwards he moved to Ecbatana to begin the rule of his vast empire. Just as soon as he arrived, however, he learned of numerous revolts against his leadership in Elam and Babylonia. He moved and crushed these quickly, but soon more revolts sprung up in Media, Parthia, Assyria and Egypt – now large swathes of his empire were openly at war with him. Just when things looked like they would end poorly for Darius, his substantial and overly loyal army came to his rescue, proceeding on a brutal campaign across Persia, smashing each revolt and executing its leaders. Within a single year every revolt was quelled and Darius was now unopposed as King of Persia.

Darius began many projects during his reign, including two canals linking the Red Sea to the River Nile

From this point on Darius' reign went, in general, from strength to strength. He undertook many military campaigns in central Asia, Aria and Scythia, radically transforming the empire's economy and adding to its infrastructure greatly with new roads, canals and civic structures. The Achaemenid Empire was vast and now under Darius' astute management and delegation it became the world's most wealthy and powerful realm, expanding rapidly and even gaining the support of some of the powerful Greek city states, which had either been won over through force of arms or by trade. Darius was now effectively untouchable – his will was law and he was without doubt the most powerful man in the entire world.

There was one problem, though. One issue that, as Darius' reign progressed, not only became more apparent but could not be quelled or conquered. It was the fact that much of mainland Greece was – openly or not – hostile to the Persian Empire and kept expressing this by interfering in his captured territory of Ionia and Lydia in Asia Minor. Small skirmishes became larger fights, trade slowed and influence weakened, with tensions between Greeks and Persians escalating as a result. After almost a decade in which Darius' forces invaded Thrace and many cities of the northern Aegean, these tensions finally boiled over into open war, with the Greeks sending an army to burn Sardis, which is located in modern Turkey.

Darius responded to this by sanctioning not only the recapture of the region, which included many of the Ionian islands, but also a full-scale invasion of the Greek mainland, with Athens and Eretria – both key players in the burning of the city of Sardis – targeted for punishment. Assembling an army of over 20,000 men and placing them at the disposal of his most trusted of commanders, Mardonius,

"Darius was now effectively untouchable, his will was law and he was the most powerful man in the entire world"

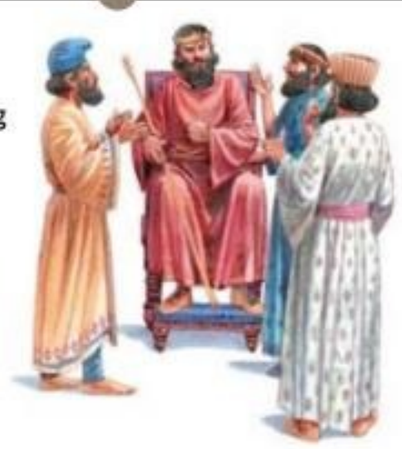
Simple spearman
According to historical reports, prior to seizing power, Darius was a simple spearman in the army of King Cambyses II of Persia, fighting much in the Egyptian campaign of 528-525
528 BCE

Timeline

550 BCE

The five Hystaspes sons
Darius I is born as the eldest of five sons to Hystaspes and Rhodugune. His father is an officer in King Cyrus II of Persia's army and a noble in his court.
550 BCE

Power grabbed
After an elevation to King Cambyses II's personal lancer, as well as the leader's death by his own hand – or maybe by assassination – Darius fights off rivals for the throne and quickly takes it for himself.
522 BCE



Indus Valley
Darius I, now King of Persia, begins a campaign of conquest into the Indus Valley. A year later he wins control of the valley from Gandhara to modern-day Karachi and appoints the Greek Scylax of Caryanda to explore the Indian Ocean.
516 BCE

Scythian failure
Darius leads a campaign against the Scythian people of eastern Europe. The Scythian army retreats deep into its territory and refuses to engage in combat with the Persians, outmanoeuvring Darius and forcing him to withdraw.
513 BCE

Asian minor submits
By 510 BCE Darius I expands his empire to include Asia Minor and some of the Greek islands. The rest of Greece resists the Persian expansion, leading to an increase in tensions between the two rival powers.
510 BCE

Darius proceeded to take Thrace and Macedon. However, before he could advance any further his fleet was wrecked in a storm off the coast of Mount Athos, stopping his conquest of Greece dead. Battered by the storm and harried by the Greek army, Darius' men were forced to withdraw, returning to Persia.

Not used to failure, Darius immediately directed his empire's vast resources to instigate another invasion, assembling a second army of 20,000 men and sending them back to Greece under the command of his nephew Artaphernes and his most trusted admiral Datis. This time Darius' army wasn't hindered in its passing and upon landing in Greece in 490 BCE it besieged, captured and burnt Eretria before quickly advancing towards the city of Marathon.

At this point, victory for Darius seemed all but certain, however outside of Marathon his army was met with a Greek one that, despite being half its number, pulled off one of the most remarkable military victories in history, defeating the Persians in mortal combat and forcing the remnants to retreat for a second time back to Persia.

This defeat at Marathon marked the end of the first Persian invasion of Greece and, despite him proceeding to live a few more years, the end of Darius I too, with the great king's health rapidly deteriorating over the next four years. Darius the Great died in Persia in 486 BCE, where his body was embalmed and then placed in a gigantic tomb. His kingdom was passed on to his son, Xerxes, who would himself would go on to famously launch the second Persian invasion of Greece. Unfortunately for him, just like his father, the might of the Persian Empire, by far one of the largest military forces in the world up to that point, would not be enough to deliver victory.

Today, views on Darius the Great's tenure as king are mixed, tending to differ from ancient sources in that they take a wider perspective on his reign, rather than merely a tally of his substantial conquests. The Persian Empire was indeed expanded by Darius and he presided over some notable victories, however his inability to defeat the Scythians and Greeks caused his military record to be tarnished. However, if you look at his reign more from a cultural, scientific and financial perspective, it's altogether less ambiguous. Darius can be credited for transforming the Archaemenid Empire into the ancient world's the capital of trade, wealth and technological innovation, with many of his advances still being relevant today.

Darius organised his empire by dividing it into provinces, with each overseen by a satrap, which was a type of governor

Darius was succeeded by his son, Xerxes, who had to contest the succession with his elder half-brother

Darius I the Great, 549-486 BCE, with a parasol bearer in a reconstruction of a relief

An economical leadership

How did Darius help make the Persian Empire the wealthiest in the world?

During his time as King of Persia, Darius I conducted an introduction of a universal currency, the daric. This was introduced shortly before 500 BCE and was applied across the empire's constituent countries as a way to regulate trade and commerce. This move was so successful that the daric even became recognised beyond the Persian Empire, into central and eastern Europe.

There were two types of daric, a gold coin and a silver coin. Only Darius himself could order the minting of gold darics, while silver darics could be minted by important generals and satraps (regional governors). The introduction of both of these coins and their widespread adoption created a boom in international trade for the Persian Empire, with textiles, tools, carpets and metal objects sold en masse. To further aid this trade boost, Darius also created a royal highway, a type of postal and commercial shipping system.

Reportedly, the daric also improved the Persian Empire's governmental revenues also, with new daric-specific taxes on land, livestock and markets created. This increased revenue helped maintain and improve the empire's infrastructure and directly funded Darius' numerous construction projects, including roads, canals and temples.

First Persian invasion
Darius I springs an invasion of mainland Greece, with his general Mardonius taking Thrace and Macedon. Unfortunately, Mardonius' fleet is wrecked in a storm off the coast of Mount Athos, stopping the conquest in its tracks.
492 BCE

Round two
Darius I launches a second campaign against the Greeks two years later under the command of military generals Datis and Artaphernes. While they make some progress, the Persian army suffers a massive defeat at the Battle of Marathon.
490 BCE

Furious in defeat
Darius is angered greatly by the failure of the Greek conquest and after the remnants of his force returns to Persia, he immediately starts preparations for another. Internal strife and power struggles in Persia delay it.
488 BCE

Darius dies
After years of preparation for another invasion of Greece, a revolt against Persian rule breaks out in Egypt, with the toll worsening Darius' health markedly. He dies shortly after and is entombed in a rock-cut sepulchre tomb.
486 BCE

486 BCE

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73/74 – 4 BCE

Herod I, King of Judea

Cruel, paranoid and held in the grips of madness, Herod I ruled the ancient kingdom of Judea with an iron fist, brutally slaying any who opposed him

Herod of Idumea was born into one of the most volatile regions of the ancient world. He quickly learned to fear rivals, suspect betrayal and watch his own back. The Romans had taken over much of his native land, and solidified their grip on the area through unpopular puppet kings. Rebellion was in the air, and from a young age Herod was forced to pick sides – work with the invaders or fight for an independent homeland. His father was a high-ranking official of King Hyrcanus II and had the ear of the Roman senate, so used this prestigious position to grant Herod a governorship in 49 BCE in the province of Galilee. Herod knew this position came from powerful Roman patronage, and he made sure the Romans knew he would continue supporting them if they supported him by instigating a brutal regime in Galilee for the glory of Rome.

Unfortunately for Herod, not everyone shared his astute sense of accommodation when it came to the Romans. In 40 BCE, the puppet king Hyrcanus died and was replaced by Antigonus, who quickly set about ejecting the Roman garrisons from Judea and exterminating any of his subjects who had conspired with them against their own people. For Herod this meant he lost his power and position. He was forced to flee into the night, and lacking anywhere else to go, he travelled to the heart of the Roman empire to beg Caesar to help him.

Herod was known to suffer hallucinations of his dead wife and slip into psychotic states when he was being threatened

Herod's presence in Rome was not an unusual one; many high-ranking foreigners travelled to the sprawling city to seek patronage and aid from the Roman senators who decided the fate of kingdoms. What was unusual was how unpopular Herod was within the city. The Jewish population saw him as a tyrannical traitor, the Romans saw him as an incompetent beggar. The decision by the senate to make Herod King of the Jews was only made through a lack of a better option. As far as Caesar and the senators were concerned, Judea needed a leader who was strong and loyal to the Roman cause. Herod wasn't strong, nor was he particularly loyal, but he understood power and the protection Rome could offer him if he became their puppet.

With thousands of Roman legionaries behind him and one of Rome's greatest war heroes, Mark Antony, by his side, Herod marched proudly back to his homeland as a conqueror in 37 BCE. He would not be satisfied with a mere governorship this time; he wanted ultimate power. He decided to ignore

During his reign, Herod commissioned a number of building projects, including a huge temple in Jerusalem

HEROD I

Judea, 73/74 – 4 BCE

Brief Bio

A client king for the Roman Republic (soon to become the Roman Empire), Herod wheedled his way to kingship. In the Bible he is remembered as the tyrant who authorised the Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem. He was just as cruel in historical fact, suffering from paranoid and violent delusions of persecution.

Herod I, King of Judea

"The Jewish population saw him as a tyrannical traitor, the Romans saw him as an incompetent beggar"

Life in the time of Herod

Roman rule

The Middle East, which consisted of the Jewish and pagan kingdoms located around the coastline of the Mediterranean, was influenced and controlled by the Roman rulers through vassals and puppet kings. The Romans needed the kingdoms for their resources, and to guard the eastern flank of the empire from the ever-present threat of the Persians.

Culture shock

Herod's kingdom was made up of a number of different tribes that settled in the area or who were cast out of Persia over the previous three centuries. Contrasting cultures were active in the region, some adopting Judaism while others followed Roman, Greek or other pagan traditions, creating deep social divides.

Fractured

Due to the fractious nature of Judean society, many areas within the kingdom that Herod ruled did not recognise him as a legitimate king. Herod himself had very little in the way of military muscle to keep the different communities in line, and often had to rely on his Roman patrons to subdue the population.

Political games

Herod's position as a Roman vassal was not an easy one. Roman politics was going through a radical transformation during this period, which involved violent civil wars. Herod had to make sure he was backing the right man, or if he wasn't, change sides quickly to avoid being disposed of.

Rebel groups

Due to the brutal repression under Herod through the Roman legions stationed in Judea, a number of rebel groups sprung up, bent on ending his reign of terror for good. These groups were forced to fight a guerrilla war, as they could not raise a standing army that could beat Caesar's legions.

the outlying provinces and concentrate his forces around Jerusalem with the approval of Antony. The siege lasted for 40 days. The defenders were desperate to hold onto their new-found freedom from Roman oppression, but in the end Herod breached the walls and thousands of bloodthirsty Roman warriors stormed the city. The devastation was horrendous; the Romans slaughtered men, women and children, brutally slaying the people who dared defy Caesar's will. Herod was outraged; he wanted to subdue the population, not butcher them, and he knew all of Judea would never forget the Jewish blood spilled that day. His complaints to Antony fell on deaf ears – as far as he was concerned, it was all in a day's work.

Antony left Herod in the smouldering ruins of his new kingdom with enough Roman guards to keep an eye on him. From now on, Herod would be taking his orders directly from Rome. Immediately, Herod self-styled himself as high ruler of what remained of Jerusalem and the rest of Judea. His subjects were less than convinced; his claim to the throne was based on little more than the Roman bodyguards he had surrounding him. As a way of trying to gain some respect after putting his own people to the sword, he married his second wife – a Hasmonean princess called Mariamne – in 32 BCE. Mariamne was from an old Judean family that could trace its origins back to the conquest of Alexander the Great, and Herod hoped the marriage would give his rule an amount of legitimacy.

> Herod's patrons were the Romans; they gave him his political legitimacy and enough military muscle to keep Judea under his rule

Herod at the Feast of Herod, where John the Baptist was beheaded

The marriage failed to gain the love of the people, and as he began to settle down to the task of ruling his unhappy kingdom, he felt more vulnerable. He feared assassination at every turn, particularly from his own family. He had his brother-in-law from his first marriage drowned in his own pleasure pool because he feared the Romans would prefer him as ruler of Judea. Then in 31 BCE, Herod received word that Rome had become engulfed in a power struggle between Octavian Caesar and Herod's old friend Antony. Like all vassals reliant on Rome's good will, Herod was forced to take sides, and in keeping with his preference for backing the strongest player, he chose Antony. The odds were very much stacked in Antony's favour, but he lost the struggle nonetheless, and Herod found himself in a very awkward position; the man in charge of Rome was the man he sided against. He sent a

Defining moment

Fall of Jerusalem

37 BCE

Herod, with the help of a number of Roman legions supplied by Mark Antony, invades Judea and lays siege to Jerusalem. The walls are surrounded and huge siege engines are built to devastate the city's populace hiding within the city. After 40 days of fighting, the townspeople begin to weaken through starvation, and Herod breaches the walls. When the Romans storm the city, they butcher the population. This angers Herod because his reputation would now be tarnished by the Romans' actions. Despite Herod's desire to appease the population after the siege, he still has the popular Antigonus executed because he represents a threat.

Timeline

74 BCE – Birth of Herod
Herod is born in Idumea as the second son of Antipater – a high-ranking official in the kingdom of Judea. Antipater quickly manoeuvres his son into a position of authority.

49 BCE – Appointed governor of Galilee
Through his father's influence, Herod is made governor of Galilee – a Judean satellite state. His father continues to gain influence throughout Judea because of his good relations with the Romans.

40 BCE – Flight to Rome
After the anti-Roman king Antigonus II takes power in Judea, Herod is forced to flee and persuade the Romans to help him regain his power in the region.

40 BCE – Elected King of the Jews
During his stay in Rome, Herod convinces the senate that he should be made King of the Jews. The Romans agree with the proviso that he acts as a vassal on his return to Judea.

32 BCE – Marriage to Mariamne
Herod marries a Hasmonean princess, Mariamne, who is also a member of the Judean ruling class, in an effort to give his new status as King of the Jews legitimacy.

number of grovelling letters to Octavian promising his undying loyalty in return for being allowed to keep his job as King of the Jews. Octavian reluctantly allowed him to remain king, again more through a lack of a better option than any reflection on Herod's skill as a leader.

Despite having survived one of the most destructive civil wars in Rome's history, Herod remained uneasy. He became estranged from his wife after he had her placed under guard to prevent her from claiming the throne for the Hasmoneans if he died during the fighting. He heard more rumours of threats against his life, he feared Mariamne would try to grab power by killing him in revenge for having her arrested, his behaviour became increasingly erratic and he fell into a strange psychotic state of paranoia. While he was suffering from this break from reality, he became convinced Mariamne was going to kill him, so he acted. He had her beheaded, but as soon as the axe fell, he came around from his delusion and realised he'd made a terrible mistake. He wept uncontrollably for weeks and began hallucinating visions of his dead wife screaming in agony in the corridors of his palace.

In an effort to try and turn his mind away from these terrifying visions, he began to construct a grand temple designed to be the envy of the ancient world. Construction started just after the death of Mariamne, and was only halted briefly after a great famine struck the city. When Caesar's aide Marcus Agrippa visited the city in 15 BCE, he was amazed at the temple's construction and how modern Jerusalem looked since its sacking by Antony. Agrippa held court with Herod, and Herod, knowing that weakness in front of the Romans could be dangerous, managed to hide his precarious mental state. Underneath this façade, he was a man edging ever closer to madness.

After Agrippa left for the gates of Rome, Herod quickly returned to the depths of paranoia. He brutally slaughtered any who spoke out against his dictatorial regime, and the country lived in fear of his violent mood swings. He burned alive a group of rabbis and their students who had pulled down a Roman imperial eagle in a building in Jerusalem. He then executed two of his eldest sons because he thought they were plotting against him. By 4 BCE, he feared that he had become so unpopular that no one would mourn his passing after he died. In a fit of depraved madness, he ordered the families of the nobility throughout the kingdom to attend him on pain of death. He then had them rounded up and placed under guard in the city's hippodrome. The guards were ordered to murder them when he died so his death would be mourned.

> In a fit of psychotic rage, Herod killed his two eldest sons because he thought they were plotting against his kingship

As the families in the hippodrome huddled together, terrified at the prospect of being put to death as a sacrifice to the passing of their own king, Herod laid on his deathbed racked with pain. He was suffering from kidney failure and the paranoid delusions that had finally left him senseless. He saw visions of his beloved Mariamne and was tortured by her mutilated face. When he finally died screaming in agony in 4 BCE, the holy men of Jerusalem proclaimed that his horrific death was, 'the penalty that God was exacting of the king for his great impiety.' Herod's sister countermanded the order to kill the Judean families and the kingdom celebrated; Herod 'the mad and wicked' was dead.

A Biblical connection

Herod has been reviled in the Bible as the monstrous tyrant who threatened the life of the baby that Christians believe was the son of God. Jesus of Nazareth's birth came at the end of Herod's reign, when his psychotic episodes had become increasingly dangerous to the people he suspected were plotting treason against him. According to the Bible, it was during one of these paranoid episodes that he heard word of a child being born proclaimed as the 'King of the Jews'. This was highly threatening as far as Herod was concerned, as he had never been fully accepted by his Jewish subjects as their true king, and any kind of usurpation from another individual claiming to be their ruler had to be destroyed. He went into a fit of rage, ordering all the sons of Bethlehem, the birth place of Jesus, murdered in what became known as the 'Massacre of the Innocents.' While the Bible is not considered historically accurate by scholars, Herod's violent reaction was alluded to by Roman sources writing after the event, and archaeologists have speculated the massacre occurred at some point in 5 BCE, a year before Herod died. His actions have since been immortalised through the story of the Nativity, and his reputation for uncompromising brutality has never been forgotten in Christian traditions.

Herod orders the execution of all first-born males in Bethlehem

Defining moment

Trouble in Rome

31 BCE

A Roman civil war threatens to engulf Judea in factional fighting and Herod must decide which man to support – Octavian Caesar or his old friend Mark Antony. Antony's force, stationed in Egypt, appears to be the strongest, and initially Herod sides with him. After Antony's defeat, Herod endears himself to Octavian, pledging his loyalty to the new Roman leader. While Octavian is unconvinced of Herod's honesty, he recognises that he has served Rome well in the past, so allows Herod to stay on as King of Judea as long as he can control the population.

The Battle of Actium as depicted by Lorenzo A Castro

Defining moment

Death of Herod

4 BCE

Herod dies in March or April 4 BCE after succumbing to 'Herod's evil', thought to be kidney disease and gangrene. He had already executed two of his eldest sons after another bout of paranoid madness, and he leaves Judea in open rebellion against Roman authority. The divided communities that make up the Judean state immediately demand independence, and only the presence of Roman legions under Octavian subdue the population adequately for Herod's three remaining sons to rule a third of the kingdom each under Roman patronage.

Mariamne arrested
In a fit of paranoia, Herod orders for Mariamne to be arrested after he fears that if he dies she will try and take the throne away from his son. This deeply offends Mariamne, and she becomes extremely hostile towards him.
31 BCE

Death of a princess
After further rumours about a plot to poison him, Herod condemns Mariamne to death to prevent her from trying to seize power. This action haunts him for the rest of his life.
29 BCE

Famine
A great famine strikes Judea and its surrounding provinces. Herod Is forced to halt some of his grand architectural projects in order to buy grain to feed the population.
25 BCE

The grand temple
As a way of appeasing the Jewish population, Herod builds a grand temple in Jerusalem. Little remains of the site today, but it was said to be one of the largest buildings in the entire city.
20 BCE

Visit of Marcus Agrippa
Agrippa visits the city to make sure Herod's loyalty has not abandoned him, and is astonished by the new masonry projects commissioned by the King of the Jews.
15 BCE

Burning of the teachers
In one of Herod's most brutal acts, he orders the death of a group of rabbis who were found destroying a Roman eagle within Jerusalem. They are thrown in a pit and burnt alive.
4 BCE

4 BCE

© Look and Learn; Getty; Alamy

The Historia Augusta boasts that Zenobia would often march for miles on foot ahead of the rest of her troops

ZENOBIA

Palmyra, 240 – 274 CE

Brief Bio

Claiming descent from the iconic Cleopatra through the Seleucid bloodline, Zenobia was a capable rider and a noted scholar, unlike many of the women in the ancient Mediterranean world. Her capabilities extended to military tactics and economic strategy. She was determined to rule Egypt, but ultimately failed.

240 – 274 CE

Zenobia

Armed with the bravery and beauty of her ancestor Cleopatra, Zenobia defied the Romans to rule her own empire in the Middle East

Blame William Shakespeare – or Elizabeth Taylor – for the fact that Cleopatra has overshadowed all other strong, cunning and comely queens of antiquity. Three centuries after the legendary Cleopatra ruled from the Pharaoh's throne in Egypt, her blood heiress, as well as equal in courage and beauty, rose to power in the eastern oasis of Palmyra, in modern-day Syria. After the assassination of her war-hero husband, Zenobia assumed confident control of this wealthy city state on the fringes of the fading Roman Empire in the 3rd century CE. Claiming independence from Rome, she would drive her loyal armies across Egypt and Palestine, briefly ruling a large and stable empire of her own. But her kingdom, and life, would ultimately be cut short by the sword of the conquering Roman Emperor Aurelian.

The true story of Zenobia is shrouded in centuries of legend. The earliest historical source is the wildly unreliable *Historia Augusta*, a colourful work of fiction posing as fact from the 4th century CE. The 18th century historian Edward Gibbon, in his monumental work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, relied heavily on descriptions of Zenobia found in the *Historia Augusta* to paint his own romanticised portrait of the Palmyrene queen.

"Modern Europe has produced several illustrious women who have sustained with glory the weight of empire," wrote Gibbon. "But... Zenobia is perhaps the only female whose superior genius broke through the servile indolence imposed on her sex by the climate and manners of Asia. She claimed her descent from the Macedonian kings of Egypt, equalled in beauty her ancestor Cleopatra and far surpassed that princess in chastity and valour. Zenobia was esteemed the most lovely as well as the most heroic of her sex."

Modern historians have pieced together a more reliable biography of Zenobia from early Christian sources, archaeological inscriptions and ancient coins, but much of her life story is still up for debate, starting with her lineage and ethnicity. Much is made of Zenobia's claimed relation to Cleopatra along the famed Seleucid bloodline on her mother's side. Her father also ruled Palmyra and was descended from a long line of Roman citizens, as well as royalty dating back to Julia Domna, the influential empress wife of Roman Emperor Lucius Septimus Severus.

> Tracing her ancestry, historians now believe that Zenobia may have had Aramaean or even Jewish origins

Whether or not either of these genealogies are true, it's clear that Zenobia was born into a wealthy and powerful family in a city state at the height of its own wealth and power. Palmyra is located in the middle of the desert halfway between the Euphrates River valley and the Mediterranean Sea.

Underground springs transformed the land into a fertile oasis and a critical stop on the Silk Road trade route that brought spices and textiles from the exotic East to the bustling markets of Rome. Palmyra's security forces offered protection to passing caravans while the government exacted an import tax – 25 per cent of every camel load – to fill Palmyra's substantial coffers.

Zenobia, as described by Gibbon, was an olive-skinned beauty who spoke Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Arabic and Ancient Egyptian. Unlike the delicate noblewomen of Rome – who wouldn't leave the house without a protective veil and covered carriage – Zenobia was a capable camel and horse rider who enjoyed wild lion and panther hunts as much as her husband.

Aurelian the unstoppable

After the Imperial Crisis of the 3rd century, the Roman Empire owed its survival to the hard-nosed military mastermind Aurelian. Born into a family of humble peasant farmers in the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire near the Balkans, he joined a long line of tough and disciplined military men. Aurelian rose to prominence as a strict and stalwart army officer during one of the messiest periods in Imperial history. In 268, the Emperor Gallienus was under fire from the so-called Thirty Tyrants, Roman military and political leaders who aimed to topple the throne. Aurelian, along with his compatriot Claudius, put down the rebellion, but may have played a role in Gallienus' assassination. Claudius succeeded as Emperor, but died after only 18 months, making room for no-nonsense Aurelian to assume the crown. He whipped the Roman legions into shape and marched them on the barbarian marauders – groups such as the Goths, Vandals, Alemanni and Juthungi – threatening Roman sovereignty in northern Italy. By this point, Zenobia had established herself as the Queen of the East and ruler of the independent Palmyrene Empire. If Aurelian had any hesitation about crushing a woman, he didn't show it, and brought the full force of his best legions against Zenobia, finally offering her a measure of mercy if she would surrender her empire at the gates of Palmyra. When she refused, Aurelian dragged her captive to Rome and had her entire inner circle executed. He returned two years later during a short-lived revolt.

Zenobia was the second wife of Odaenathus, the ruler of Palmyra and a critical ally of Rome in the east. During Odaenathus' rule, Palmyra was an important buffer state between the Romans and the Persian Sasanian Empire. Rome allowed Palmyra to remain independent in exchange for its strategic neutrality in the region. In 260 CE, the Persians captured the Roman Emperor Valerian and conquered the eastern Roman stronghold of Antioch. Fearing a Persian expansion towards Palmyra, Odaenathus struck first, decimating the Persian army as it returned victorious from Antioch. Later Palmyrene campaigns pushed the Persians all the way back to their capital. These victories won Odaenathus praise and titles from Rome and may have triggered visions of his own future rise to be Emperor himself.

Odaenathus would not live long enough to find out. He was murdered by a nephew along with his son Hairan, from his first wife, over a hunting argument. Odaenathus' death left Zenobia's young son Vaballathus as heir to the throne. Since the boy was too young to rule – between five and ten years old – Zenobia assumed the role of regent, a position that quickly evolved into the undisputed political and military leader of Palmyra. On coins recovered from the years after Odaenathus' murder, archaeologists first find them with Vaballathus' face on the front and Zenobia's on the back. Very quickly these positions are reversed.

As the de facto ruler of Palmyra, Zenobia picked up exactly where her husband left off, with her own dreams of a Palmyrene Empire. Historians argue about Zenobia's specific motivations and political calculations. During the 3rd century, the Roman Empire suffered an extended period of great tribulation known as the Imperial Crisis. The Empire had gone through 19 emperors in 30 years, most of them killed by ambitious generals or their own Praetorian Guard. Britain and Gaul had split from the Empire, the Goths were invading from the north, there was a smallpox epidemic in the provinces and pirates were disrupting trade along the Libyan coast.

Zenobia's chief counsellor, Cassius Longinus, was a noted scholar, Platonic philosopher, as well as a literary critic

In Rome's moment of weakness, Zenobia saw an opportunity, but did she see herself as Rome's partner in empire, or its conqueror?

What happens next is undisputed. In the year 269 CE, with the support of her husband's battle-tested General Zabdas, Zenobia marched the Palmyrene army into Egypt, what she called her ancestral homeland. When the Roman prefect of Egypt objected to Zenobia's occupation, she swiftly had him beheaded. Zenobia bestowed upon herself the title of Queen of Egypt and commissioned a ten-volume history of Cleopatra to commemorate the victory. If the Roman Emperor Claudius had his

"When the Roman prefect of Egypt objected to Zenobia's occupation, she swiftly had him beheaded"

Defining moment

Assassination of Odaenathus
266 CE

Zenobia's husband, Odaenathus, died far from the battlefield. One story sees him going on a hunting trip with a rude nephew, Maeonius, who Odaenathus punished by taking away his horse and locking him up for a few nights. Insulted, young Maeonius killed the Palmyrene king at a party. Other accounts implicate Rome in the murder. Another story puts Zenobia herself at the centre of the plot. Odaenathus was killed along with his eldest son, putting the throne in the hands of Zenobia's son Vaballathus and under her capable control.

Timeline

240 CE

A Queen is born
Cleopatra claimed to be descended from Isis and Zenobia hitched her own star to Cleopatra's. She was born into the ruling family of Palmyra and schooled in language, philosophy, horse riding and hunting.
240 CE

Her match in marriage
Zenobia became the second wife of Odaenathus, whose bravery and cunning on the battlefield were a perfect match for his ambitious young warrior bride.
258 CE

An heir in waiting
Zenobia bore Odaenathus a son, Vaballathus, but the direct heir to the Palmyrene throne was Hairan, a child by Odaenathus' first wife. In Zenobia's day, it was common for competing wives to jostle – or even kill – to get their son on the throne.
259 CE

Taking Egypt
Zenobia and her trusted general marched uncontested into Egypt while Rome's military was busy fighting off Goth invaders and Libyan pirates. The Egyptian people embraced Zenobia as the rightful heir to Cleopatra's greatness.
269 CE

own objections, he was too busy fighting off the Goths to worry about the upstart empress in Egypt.

Without Roman resistance, Zenobia the warrior queen was given free rein to extend her territory into Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. At its greatest extent, Zenobia's empire stretched from the Nile River in the south up through the Sinai Peninsula and Palestine, north to the Black Sea and west to modern-day Ankara, Turkey. Around this time, Zenobia changed her coins yet again to add the title Augustus, or empress, alongside her own portrait.

In 270, a new face appeared on the scene in the form of Aurelian, a lifelong military man who rose to the ranks to become Emperor of Rome and Restitutor Orbis, or restorer of the world. Aurelian brought order and discipline back to the Roman military. He pushed out invading Germanic tribes such as the Vandals from northern Italy and erected the fortress-like Aurelian Walls around Rome. Next he marched against the Goths in the Balkans and crushed them. By 272, Aurelian had dealt with Rome's most pressing problems and was ready to turn his attention east to the so-called Palmyrene Empire and its warrior empress. The *Historia Augusta* relates Zenobia writing a letter to Aurelian proposing that they rule the Mediterranean as co-emperors. If that letter ever actually existed, then Aurelian likely ignored it.

Aurelian and Zenobia first met in battle at Antioch. Zenobia's forces were anchored by heavily armoured cavalry called clibanarii, using a style of warfare borrowed from the Persians. Both horses and riders were covered with thick armoured plates to withstand a line of Roman archers known as sagittariorum. The clibanarii had a weakness, though, and Aurelian exploited it brilliantly. In Latin, clibanarii means the camp oven-bearers, because the armoured suits heat up like a furnace in the midday Sun. Aurelian feinted retreat and lead the cavalry on lengthy chases, timing his greatest offensive to coincide with the greatest heat of the day. Zenobia's overheated cavalry were no match for Aurelian's well-trained legions and Zenobia retreated to Emissa, modern-day Homs.

Aurelian attacked Zenobia again at Emissa, using Palestinian slingers – armed with rocks and slings, like young David who fought Goliath – to disrupt and confuse the Palmyrene cavalry. At one point, the 70,000-strong cavalry turned in on itself, trampling its own horsemen in the chaos. Zenobia was right there alongside her troops. "In both [battles] the Queen of Palmyra animated the armies by her presence," Gibbon writes. Facing defeat at Emissa, however, Zenobia decided to flee to the stronghold of Palmyra on her speediest camel.

Back in Palmyra, Zenobia failed to gather enough forces to engage in conventional warfare. Aurelian laid siege to the city for months, which, according to Gibbon, drew criticism from Rome.

In *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon quotes a letter from Aurelian: "The Roman people speak with contempt of the war that I am waging against a woman. They're ignorant both of the character and of the power of Zenobia. It's impossible to enumerate her warlike preparations, of stones, of arrows and every species of missile weapons. Every part of the wall is provided with two or three ballistae and artificial fires are thrown from her military engines. The fear of punishment has armed her with courage."

Zenobia's rule of Palmyra, including her rebellious campaign against the Roman Empire, lasted less than five years

In the end, the gods favoured Rome, Palmyra swiftly fell and Zenobia, along with her son and heir, was captured. The *Historia Augusta* recalls Zenobia being paraded through the streets of Rome in golden chains. Other accounts say she died on the journey from Palmyra, while others still claim she committed suicide – like her tragic heroine Cleopatra – rather than suffer the indignity of submitting to the Emperor or facing the jeering Roman crowds.

Defining moment

Siege of Palmyra 274 CE

According to exaggerated accounts in the *Historia Augusta*, Aurelian's final offensive against Zenobia at the desert oasis of Palmyra was almost a failure. As the Roman legions marched from Emessa, they were hounded by Syrian robbers and target practise for Persian assassins. His troops exhausted from two massive battles, Aurelian attempted to strike a deal with Zenobia, promising her life and the freedom of her people in return for peaceful surrender. Zenobia said that she, like Cleopatra, preferred death to dishonour. She threatened Aurelian with talk of reinforcements from Persia. Aurelian surrounded and starved out the city, bringing Palmyra to its knees.

Life in the time of Zenobia

Stealing from Rome's own breadbasket

Rome supplied free rations of wheat to its citizens to win their political loyalty, but much of the wheat was imported from Egypt. When Zenobia conquered Egypt, she allegedly cut off the wheat supply, a tactic not unlike kicking a hornet's nest.

By name only

The wealthy city state of Palmyra held a unique position in the Roman Empire. It functioned as an independent colony, free to collect its own taxes, but privy to the protection of the emperor. Palmyra grew fat off the taxes levied on caravans travelling the Silk Road to the west.

Spice security

As a critical stop on the Silk Road, Palmyra was responsible for protecting the silk and spice caravans along the stretch of road within its boundaries. The task fell to private armies of swift horsemen that earned a reputation for their prowess at repelling bandits.

Lost in translation

Zenobia's full name in Greek was Septimia Zenobia, but was most likely a Latinisation of the Arabic al-Zabba, which was itself a translation of Zenobia's true Aramaic name, Bat-Zabbai, or 'daughter of Zabbai'. Zenobia's native language was Aramaic.

Roman triumph

Some sources claim that a captured and chained Zenobia was paraded through Rome as part of Aurelian's massive triumph in 274 CE, featuring 800 gladiators and conquered captives from every barbarian tribe. Some say she rode in a golden chariot he had built for her entrance into Rome.

274

Face fit for a coin
Zenobia ordered the Alexandria mint to produce new coins featuring her silhouette and the presumptuous inscription, 'S. Zenobia Aug', shorthand for Septimia Zenobia Augusta, Empress of the East.
270 CE

Bread baroness
Zenobia further provoked Rome by cutting off Egyptian wheat exports to the Imperial capital, where politicians assuaged the plebeians with free bread and circuses. If she was picking a fight, she would certainly get one.
271 CE

Eastern empire
At its peak, Zenobia's Palmyrene Empire absorbed the entire eastern shore of the Mediterranean, stretching from the Nile to the Black Sea. Most of her conquered territory submitted to their new empress without resistance.
272 CE

Aurelian strikes back
Emperor Aurelian follows his conquest of the Goths by turning his attention – and his armies – east to the Palmyrene Empire. In a rare move by the severe general, Aurelian spares the citizens of conquered Palmyrene cities, causing even more to surrender peacefully.
273 CE

© Alamy

c. 60 CE

Boudica

In the single-minded pursuit of vengeance, the warrior queen of the Iceni massacred thousands of Romans and almost caused the empire to abandon Britannia entirely

While Boudica of the Iceni was still mourning the death of her husband Prasutagus, a horde of Roman agents forced their way into her home. The armed men seized the Celtic queen, along with her two daughters, and dragged them all into public view. There, before the eyes of her people, Boudica was brutally flogged as if she were a slave and her two virgin daughters raped. When the violence was over, the Romans continued their acts of cruelty on the Iceni by confiscating the land of their chief nobles. Furious at their actions, the queen quickly gathered her people. She would stop at nothing until she had her revenge against the Roman Empire.

The Roman commanders gave the orders for these acts in 60 CE after they received the will of recently deceased King Prasutagus. To show his loyalty to Rome, the British ruler left half of his kingdom to the emperor, but bequeathed the other half to his daughters – an act of love that would backfire in ways he could never have imagined. According to Roman law, contracts with client kings terminated upon their death, and thus turn all of the possessions of the kingdom into Roman property. Usually, this transition from a native monarchy to Roman rule was carried out with far less brutality, in the hope of gaining the loyalty and allegiance of the newly conquered people. Yet

the Romans were greatly insulted, not just because Prasutagus presumed to think he could leave such a large portion of his kingdom to his heirs – the shocking reaction to his will was mostly because these heirs were women. While powerful women were relatively common among the Britons, female rulers were an absurd concept in the patriarchal society of Rome. And the Romans would make their feelings about this very clear.

It did not take long for thousands of aggrieved Britons to hear of the uprising of the Iceni, as well as the atrocities committed on Boudica and her family. The Romans had only conquered Britannia less than 20 years before, during the reign of Emperor Claudius in 43 CE, and the oppressive treatment of their new subjects by imperial officials had created numerous rebels all over the island. For several years after the conquest, most insurgents became a part of the full-fledged guerrilla war led by Caratacus, king of the Catuvellauni. After the decisive victories of the Romans over his forces during the invasion, the king learned not to face the legions on the battlefield, instead using his superior knowledge of the local terrain to carry out successful guerrilla tactics on the foreign army.

Iceni gold coins

Though the Iceni officially became allies of the Roman Empire after the conquest, a faction of the Iceni also participated in a minor revolt in 48 CE, when the governor Publius Ostorius Scapula enacted a draconian measure to discourage Britons from joining Caratacus. The governor had his men force their way into the homes of the Iceni and confiscated all weapons. However, when the Iceni insurgents revolted with warriors from the neighbouring Catuvellauni and Coritani, they had no chance against the Roman army. Scapula quickly crushed the rebel forces when he stormed the Iceni hill fort they fought from and slaughtered all of the rebels.

This painting depicts the massacre at Londinium, as Boudica's army invaded and left no one alive

The Iceni had more than enough cause to rally behind their queen, but the main reason Britons from other tribes flocked to swell her ranks was that they no longer had any major rebel army to join. In 51 CE, Scapula continued his campaign to quell the unrest throughout the island by targeting its source, Caratacus. And once the rebel king was forced to meet the Roman army in pitched battle, the governor defeated him. Caratacus then fled to the court of Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes, to seek refuge. Yet instead of aiding a fellow British ruler, the queen betrayed her tribal rival to the Romans, gaining much trust from her overlords but losing the respect of many of her people. Among those who had fallen out of favour with her was Venutius, her husband.

After Cartimandua divorced him in 57 CE, he attempted to seize her kingdom from her but was thwarted by the Roman forces that came to the aid of their client queen. Although he would later become the next great rebel leader, Venutius would not make another move until more than a decade later and remained in hiding throughout the Boudican rebellion.

Unable to join the forces of Caratacus or Venutius, many discontent Britons who still wished

> "Powerful women were common among Britons, but an absurd concept to Rome"

The Romans

Gaius Suetonius Paulinus

When Paulinus became the governor of Britannia in 58 CE, he had already proven himself to be a very skilled general. In 40 CE, he was the first Roman to lead an army over the Atlas Mountains in North Africa.

Gnaeus Julius Agricola

Agricola was only a military tribune under Paulinus during the Boudican revolt. However, his participation in the conflict was one of the major reasons that his son-in-law, Tacitus, recorded the event.

Petilius Cerialis

Cerialis was a young and impetuous commander when he first entered the historical record as the legate of the ninth legion. Yet even after his disastrous failure against Boudica, he managed to become governor of Britannia in 71 CE.

The road to rebellion

Invasion of Britannia
Invasions by Gaius Julius Caesar are the first violent conflicts between the Romans and the Britons. Though successful, no permanent Roman presence is created.
55 and 54 BCE

Caligula fails to invade Britannia
Instead of crossing the channel, the confused emperor orders his soldiers to gather up seashells and then place them in their helmets.
40 CE

Roman conquest of Britannia
While Aulus Plautius is chief military commander, he waits for Emperor Claudius to join him in the end and claim the overall victory for himself.
43 CE

Revolt suppressed
Governor Publius Ostorius Scapula suppresses a revolt from an Iceni faction, angered over the unwarranted search of their homes and seizure of their weapons.
48 CE

Colonia is established
The colonia at Camulodunum is created at the former capital of the Trinovantes. Native nobles were appointed to oversee the construction of the temple of Claudius.
50 CE

The tribes

Iceni
Location: Norfolk
Leader: Boudica
The tribe was possibly the Cenimagni recorded by Julius Caesar when he invaded in 55 BCE. Except for the small-scale revolt in 48 CE, the Iceni remained a loyal client kingdom until the Boudican rebellion.

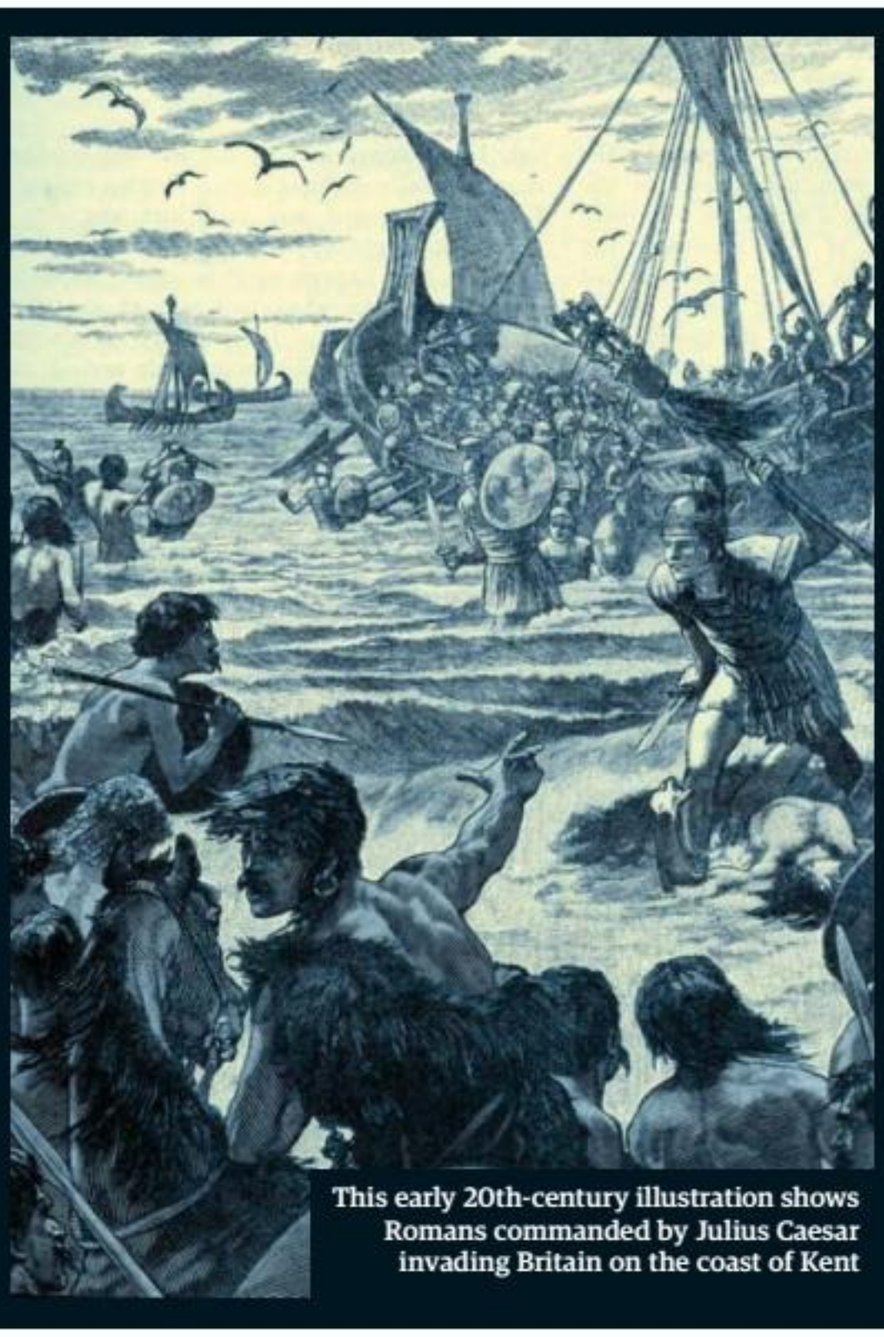
Trinovantes
Location: Essex, Suffolk and parts of Greater London
Leader: The Roman Governor of Britannia
By the time of the rebellion, the Trinovantes had fully become part of the province of Britannia. The tribe was enraged over the colonia at Camulodunum.

Brigantes
Location: Northern England and the Midlands
Leader: Cartimandua
The Romans benefited from their alliance with Cartimandua, as the vast territory of her tribe served as a buffer zone between the province and hostile tribes further north.

to make a stand against the empire continued to increase Boudica's forces as she led them south into the lands of the Trinovantes. Like the Iceni, the Trinovantes harboured a deep resentment towards the Romans for the events of the past decade, and so became the second major tribe to join in with the revolt. While warriors from tribes all over Britannia rallied to the movement, none of the tribes contributed as much manpower as the Iceni and the Trinovantes. Both tribes were so heavily invested in the cause that their warriors were followed by an enormous trail of carts driven by their families and loaded with their possessions. In the hope of restoring their people's honour, the Iceni and the Trinovantes were willing to risk everything they had.

Including the women, children and elderly who accompanied the march, the British horde may have increased to well over 100,000 people, with a core of warriors that was tens of thousands strong. Confident of overwhelming any meagre force the Romans sent against her, Boudica led her army towards their first target – the colonia of Camulodunum. The town was not only the most obvious choice for the rebels to attack, as it was in line to become the capital of the province, but its destruction was also the main reason the Trinovantes joined the revolt. It was imperative that the colony was burned to the ground.

Camulodunum was once the capital of the Trinovantes until the Romans established it as a



This early 20th-century illustration shows Romans commanded by Julius Caesar invading Britain on the coast of Kent

Life under the Romans

Life was difficult for the Britons under imperial rule, particularly during the first few decades after the conquest. Whereas before one king had ruled each tribe, both a governor and a procurator managed the new province of Britannia. The oppression enforced by these two officials was relentless – the Britons were mercilessly taxed to not only pay for the invasion of their own lands but also to cover the costs of extravagant building projects like the expansion of the colonia at Camulodunum. Additionally, attempts were made to weaken the military might of the Britons by forcing their young warriors to join the Roman army on foreign campaigns. The homes of some tribes were even ransacked and deprived of all weapons. However, several loyal client kings and aristocrats benefited greatly, for they gained access to large amounts of Mediterranean trade.

Defeat of Caratacus
Caratacus is beaten by Governor Scapula, ending a nine-year campaign of guerrilla warfare. He fails to gain aid from the Brigantes.
51 CE

Nero is Emperor
Nero becomes Emperor of Rome after the death of Claudius. Unrest erupts among anti-Roman Brigantes.
54 CE

Influential divorce
Cartimandua divorces Venutius, and takes his armour-bearer, Vellocatus, as her new consort. The queen then requests Roman aid in order to defeat her ex-lover's army.
57 CE

News of rebellion
The army of Governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus assaults the druids on the island of Mona and slaughters them. He is then informed of the rebellion in the east.
60 CE

Chaos in Rome
Rebels of the Brigantes exploit chaos in the 'Year of Four Emperors'. When Venutius attacks, Romans save Cartimandua, but not her kingdom.
69 CE

Boudica's battle

The Iceni queen crossed the country in pursuit of vengeance

1 The Call to Arms

As Boudica gathered her people, warriors flocked from all over Britannia to join her rebellion against the Roman Empire. The queen then led her army south to combine with the substantial forces of the Trinovantes before advancing towards Camulodunum.

4 Battle of Watling Street

Boudica's forces faced the Roman army in the Midlands, most likely near Manduessedum. The battlefield was chosen by Governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus to decrease the advantage of the queen's vastly superior numbers.

2 Legion IX Ambushed

The moment the commander of the ninth legion, Petillius Cerialis, was alerted about the uprising of Boudica, he immediately advanced his forces to save the undefended colonia of Camulodunum. However, his army was surrounded and destroyed in a clever ambush.

3 Destruction of Three Cities

Boudica and her army moved almost completely unopposed to devastate Camulodunum, Londinium and Verulamium, and slaughtered well over 30,000 Romans citizens. The queen then advanced down Watling Street to confront the Roman army as it returned from the west.

Shield

The curvature of the Roman shields helped to provide more protection and allowed the soldiers to create their famous tortoise formation.

■ **Romans legions**

■ **Britons**

Boudica, with her daughters, leading her army of rebels

colonia for retired veterans in 50 CE. Arable land was also required for the farms of the soldiers, so it was taken from members of the tribe. As some of the strongest supporters of the Romans, the nobles of the Trinovantes were 'rewarded' even further for their loyalty with membership into the priesthood of the Augustales. As priests dedicated to the worship of the deified emperors, it was the duty of the Augustales to build the grand temple of Claudius within their former capital. To pay for the temple and the construction required to transform Camulodunum into a colonia, the Trinovantes were given considerable loans by both the Roman state and the fabulously wealthy statesman Seneca. However, the top financial officer, or procurator, of the province, Catus Decianus, had recently demanded that all loans given to the tribe were to be paid back in full immediately, or the funds would be taken by force. After enduring excessive taxation and then given such an ultimatum, the Trinovantes decided that their support for the empire had come to an end.

When the Roman citizens of Camulodunum became aware of the approaching horde led by Boudica, they desperately pleaded for help to the procurator in nearby Londinium. Since the governor, Gaius Suetonius Paulinus, was leading a campaign in the far west of the province, Decianus was the second highest-ranking Roman official in the vicinity. But the procurator was not a military commander and, therefore, was only able to send little more than 200 ill-equipped men to reinforce the small garrison already stationed in the town. Shortly afterwards, the financial official fled to Gaul in disgrace for his approval of the severe maltreatment of the Iceni and Trinovantes that led to the rebellion. What the citizens of Camulodunum did not know was that the ninth legion, led by Quintus Petillius Cerialis, was already

Romans versus the Celts

Helmet
Roman legionary soldiers wore a bronze helmet called a 'galea'. Although the Britons had developed helmets by the time of Boudica, many went unprotected.
Spear
Both Romans and Celts had spears and javelins, but the Roman 'pilum' had a much cleverer design. The javelin's shank was designed to break on impact, meaning that it couldn't be picked up and used by the enemy, and it could penetrate a shield so deeply that the enemy would be forced to discard it.
Armour
The Celts wore little to no armour, and often painted themselves with blue woad dye before battle. Roman soldiers, on the other hand, were heavily armoured with metal plates and shin guards.
Sword
The Roman short sword was deadly when fighting at close quarters, while the longer Celtic sword was rendered almost useless in the crush.

on its way to save the town before Boudica was able to reach it. In the hope of intercepting the rebel horde, Cerialis rushed towards their presumed location. The Roman commander moved with too much haste, for he and his men were unable to detect the trap they had walked into before it was too late. Suddenly, British warriors appeared from all directions and an onslaught ensued. Of the 2,000 soldiers under his command, only 500 made it out of the devastating ambush alive with Cerialis. Boudica continued on her course to Camulodunum as the beaten legion fled to the safety of a small fort.

With no solid defences constructed yet to protect the growing colonia, the citizens of Camulodunum watched in horror as Boudica led her army into the town, unopposed, and ordered the destruction of everything in sight. Dozens of buildings were set on fire and thousands of people were slaughtered in the streets. Boudica did not intend on taking prisoners, nor did her warriors, so any Roman caught by the armed mob was killed. The Roman soldiers and the rest of the survivors barricaded themselves within the massive temple of Claudius, but the desperately outnumbered force was completely surrounded. Amid the black smoke filling the sky and reek of decaying flesh surrounding the edifice, the defenders held off the British horde for two long days. But, by the end of the second day, the besiegers finally broke through the remaining barricades and massacred all who remained within the despised temple.

Boudica and her men pillaged as many spoils as they could find in the ruins of Camulodunum before they moved on towards the merchant town of Londinium. This time around, the citizens were aware of the advancing army, with ample time to allow them to gather their possessions and abandon the town. Yet hope was with the Romans, for Governor Paulinus had arrived with a small contingent of cavalry to survey the situation. Soon afterwards, however, optimism gave way to feelings of horror as the citizens of Londinium realized that Paulinus planned to retreat from the city and leave it open to the British marauders.

In order to reach the town as quickly as possible, the governor had been forced to travel ahead of the vast majority of his army. Since he was hopelessly outnumbered, Paulinus decided to reunite with his forces and meet Boudica in a place of his choosing, where her superior numbers would not be so much of an advantage.

Londinium was almost deserted by the time that Boudica reached the town, and any Roman left behind was slain and imperial buildings were destroyed. Unspeakable atrocities were also

"Boudica did not intend on taking prisoners, so any Roman caught by the armed mob was killed"

perpetrated on some of the aristocratic women caught in the town, possibly in revenge for the crimes committed against Boudica. After the Britons mutilated their breasts and faces, these unfortunate Roman noblewomen were executed by impalement on spikes. Once the absolute destruction of Londinium was complete and sufficient booty gathered, the horde moved on to sack another smaller town, Verulamium, before it headed down the road now known as Watling Street towards the ultimate confrontation with the Roman army under Paulinus. In her wake, Boudica left a path of destruction that may have included the deaths of as many as 70,000 Romans and Romanised Britons.

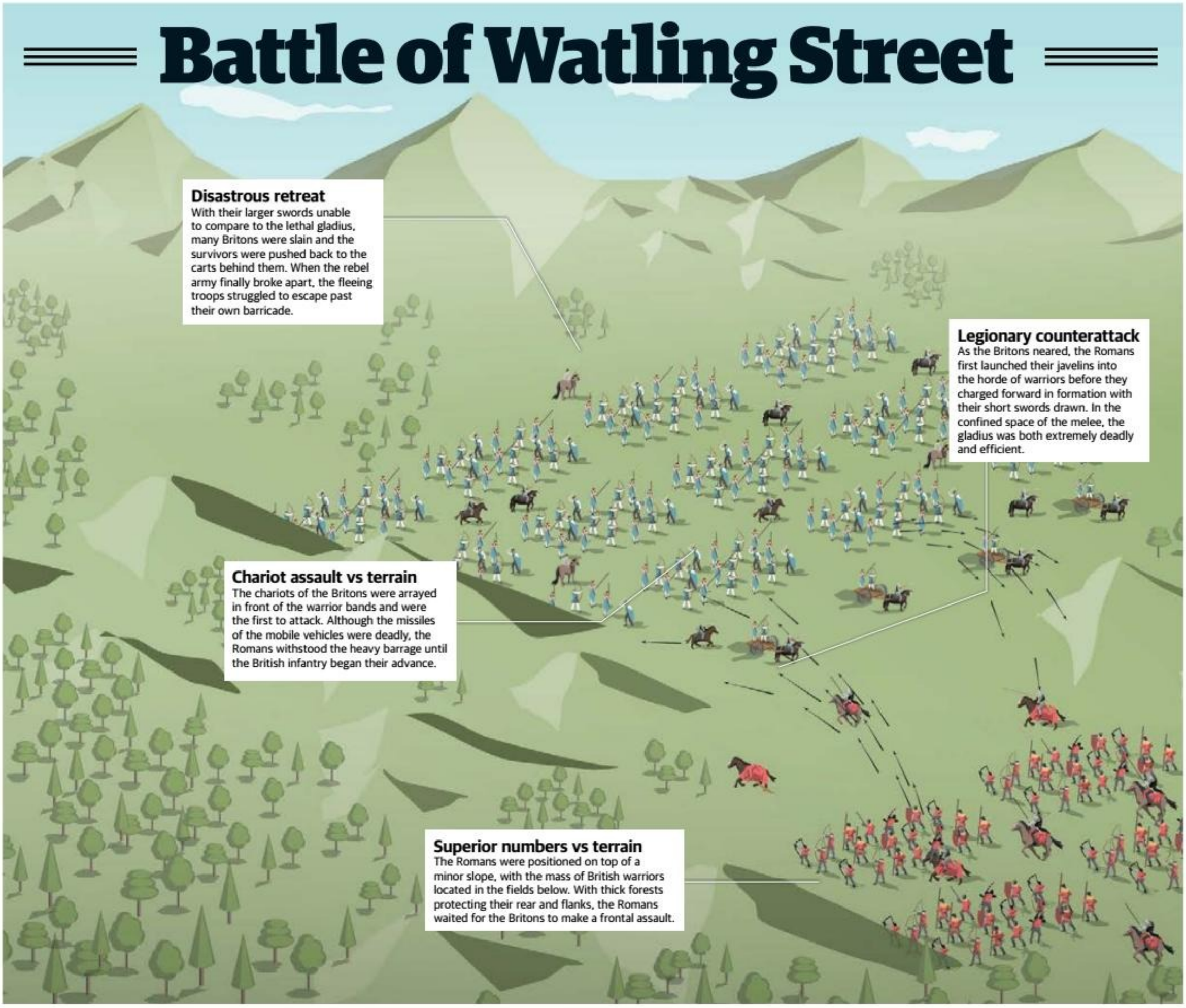
The legionaries that Paulinus was forced to leave behind when he made his rapid trek east were returning from the successful invasion of the island

> "When destruction of Londinium was complete and sufficient booty gathered, the horde went on to sack another town"

of Mona, off the coast of Wales. As a major religious centre of the druids, Mona was perceived as a huge threat to the Romans, for the Celtic priests had long been the supporters of nearly every uprising against imperial rule across Gaul and Britannia. Therefore, when Paulinus became the governor of Britannia in 58 CE, he made it his top priority to crush all resistance on Mona and massacre all of the rebel priests found there.

After their major triumph against the druids, the legionaries were highly motivated to eradicate the British insurgents of Boudica. After the devastation of Verulamium, Boudica continued down Watling Street as Paulinus gathered his forces. With only Legion XX, some units from Legion XIV and auxiliaries, as well as the small remnant of Legion IX, Paulinus' army only numbered about 10,000 soldiers. The governor would have had slightly more men at his disposal, but the commander of Legion II failed to muster his troops and combine with the forces of Paulinus. Boudica, on the other hand, led a horde of hundreds of thousands that may have

Battle of Watling Street


Disastrous retreat
With their larger swords unable to compare to the lethal gladius, many Britons were slain and the survivors were pushed back to the carts behind them. When the rebel army finally broke apart, the fleeing troops struggled to escape past their own barricade.
Legionary counterattack
As the Britons neared, the Romans first launched their javelins into the horde of warriors before they charged forward in formation with their short swords drawn. In the confined space of the melee, the gladius was both extremely deadly and efficient.
Chariot assault vs terrain
The chariots of the Britons were arrayed in front of the warrior bands and were the first to attack. Although the missiles of the mobile vehicles were deadly, the Romans withstood the heavy barrage until the British infantry began their advance.
Superior numbers vs terrain
The Romans were positioned on top of a minor slope, with the mass of British warriors located in the fields below. With thick forests protecting their rear and flanks, the Romans waited for the Britons to make a frontal assault.

A depiction of Boudica, queen of the Iceni

Boudica and her army of rebels killed thousands before they were stopped by the Romans

consisted of as many as 230,000. But Paulinus had two advantages – the training of his men, and the fact that they were all battle-ready soldiers.

When Boudica finally reached the Romans in the Midlands, they were most likely positioned near Manduessedum. Paulinus had chosen an ideal location to assemble his men, with a thick forest behind them and slopes protecting their flanks. The legionaries formed the centre of the army with auxiliary units on each side and cavalry contingents on the wings. The warrior bands of Boudica's massive host gathered before the Roman legions, brandishing their swords and screaming war cries as Boudica rode along the front lines in a chariot with her daughters.

As her long hair flowed in the wind, the tall warrior queen raised her powerful voice above the tumult to give a rousing speech that reminded her troops of the cruelty and oppression they were fighting against. On the other side of the field, Paulinus also raised the confidence of his men through very direct words. He emphasised their extensive training, for them to see that their professionalism was a much greater asset than overwhelming numbers.

When the two forces collided at the battle of Watling Street, the chariots of the Britons wreaked havoc down the Roman lines. However, the large infantries of each army inevitably clashed and it was the superior equipment and martial skills of the Romans that won the day. Furthermore, when the Britons broke and fled from the slaughter caused by the deadly Roman short swords, they were trapped by the semi-circle of carts and could not escape. In the end, everything in the path of the victorious legionaries was slain, including women, children and the pack animals travelling with the Britons.

In defeat, Boudica drank poison, choosing to end her own life rather than fall into the hands of the Romans. Although ultimately unsuccessful at removing the Romans from Britannia, Boudica had her revenge with the deaths of thousands of her imperial oppressors. In fact, so much devastation had occurred that Emperor Nero nearly gave up on the fragile fledgling province, due to the fact that it had become more costly to maintain than it was financially beneficial. He would have done so if it were not for the courageous efforts of Paulinus. Afterwards, the governor went on to continue the savagery of the Romans, focusing his brutality primarily on the remaining people of the Iceni and Trinovantes until they were sufficiently subdued. Boudica may have achieved the vengeance she sought, but the sad truth is that her people faced even more oppression after her death because of her actions against the empire.

"In the end, everything in the path of the legionaries was slain, including women, children and animals"

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5th – 6th century

King Arthur

King, emperor, hero, god – the name King Arthur conjures an array of images, but just how much truth is there to this ancient legend?

The armoured bodies lay so thick on the ground that as the rain pelted the field, it fell with an incessant ding-ding-ding upon metal. There remained but two figures facing each other across the plain; one raised his head toward the other, his visor masking his face and his black spiked armour glinting as the rain ran down the polished surface. The other stood against the setting sun, his helmet lost and his long golden hair wet against his forehead. There were wrinkles around his eyes, flecks of grey in his beard and dinks in his gleaming silver armour, but he grasped his long sword with a strong, firm grip. His foe was the first to move, stabbing his sword forward with a jerky, sudden jab. The silver knight deflected him easily with a swift, fluid movement and thrust his sword forward, driving it through his enemy's chest. The gleaming sword sliced through the armour like silk. But his foe had landed a blow too, blood seeping from his mouth, and with his final ounce of strength he drove his sword through the silver knight's back. There was a moment of silence as the wind moved around them, then the two fell as one.

> The perfect intermingling of fact and fiction for a nation who needed a strong figure

The tale depicts the legendary Battle of Camlann, a conflict that saw the demise of one of the most famous kings in British history, a monarch so ingrained in the national conscience that his tale appears on the halls of the British Parliament. A figure with such prominence that some are so desperate to prove he was real that great excavations and archaeological digs are held in his name – King Arthur.

But who was Arthur really? Did this 'King of the Britons' ever even exist? Or is he simply a myth created to inspire a population in need of heroes? Although historians have failed to agree on who exactly may have inspired the King Arthur we know today, there are many viable candidates. Lucius Artorius Castus, a Roman soldier of the late-2nd or early-3rd century is a possible Arthur. This career warrior supposedly led troops of Sarmatians against invading Caledonians in ancient Britain, all the while grasping a standard bearing a large red dragon pendant – the inspiration behind Arthur's surname 'Pendragon.' Historians hypothesise that his military victories prompted him to be raised to a figure of great bravery among the Welsh, and thus the character of Arthur was born. The

"A host of Celtic literature depicting glorious victories against the invading armies infested the folklore"

Camelot

The legendary castle of Camelot is at the centre of many Arthurian legends and serves as the home of the mighty King Arthur and his court. Said to stand along a river in the middle of a thick forest, Camelot is often portrayed as a towering structure of impressive architecture and a symbol of chivalry and might. The first mention of Camelot is in the Chrétien de Troyes' poem Lancelot, The Knight Of The Cart written in the 1170s, but it is only in passing, and Caerleon is identified as Arthur's home, a town in Wales. It wasn't until the 13th century that Camelot became more prominent. Arguments concerning its actual location still continue; many believe it is in Carlisle or even Cadbury Castle in Somerset, but Thomas Malory firmly placed Camelot in Winchester, which encouraged the iconic depiction of the castle. For many Camelot is not a literal place, but rather a representation of Arthur's power and the realm the characters inhabited.

In legend, Camelot is a castled city home to a church and famously, the Round Table

A depiction of King Arthur fighting Saxons in the 6th century

Badbury Rings in Dorset is said to be the site where King Arthur won his greatest victory against the Saxons

Above: A monument for the Lady in the Lake, a mythical figure connected to Arthur

problem with Artorius, just like Arthur, is that there is a staggering lack of historical recording of his supposed impressive deeds, which people would expect from a figure so prominent that he became a near-immortal legend.

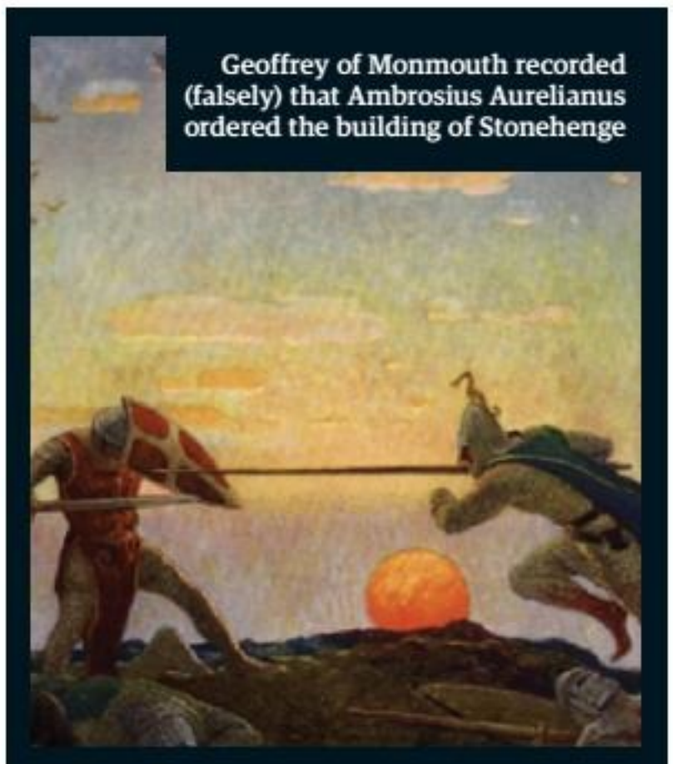
A man actually called 'King of the Britons' in ancient sources is Riothamus who lived in the 5th century. Riothamus reportedly travelled into Gaul twice, just as Arthur did, and was betrayed by a close friend, just as Arthur was. And when Riothamus died he was near a town called Avallon, while Arthur was supposedly carried off to 'Avalon' upon his death. Comparisons have also been drawn between Arthur and Ambrosius Aurelianus, a Romano-British leader who was well known for his victorious campaigns against the Saxons. There are also theories that Aurelianus commanded the forces at the Battle of Bandon Hill, the very same battle where Arthur apparently led an army. Aurelianus is recorded as having the virtues of a 'gentleman' and was a Christian – two key qualities Arthur shares.

One of the more unusual origin theories of Arthur's origin comes from his name itself. Deriving from the Celtic word 'Art', meaning 'bear', it is possible that Arthur is simply a personification of a Celtic bear god. The Celtic tradition of worshipping revered animal spirits was popular, so it would make sense for their celebrated hero to originate from such beliefs.

There are plenty more candidates for possible Arthurs, as any warrior who was successful in ancient Briton with a vaguely similar name seems to be a feasible option. Whether any of these are actually the true Arthur of legend we may never know, but one thing we can trace reasonably accurately is Arthur's emergence and journey through literature.

The very earliest mention of Arthur is in *Historia Brittonum* written in 830 by Nennius, a Welsh monk, which says: "Then in those days Arthur fought against them with the kings of the Britons, but he was commander in those battles." Because of the vague mention it is difficult to assess whether this Arthur was actually a king himself or simply a mighty warrior. Nevertheless he goes on to list 12 battles Arthur was involved in, 12 battles that occur over such great distances and lengths of time that it would be impossible for one man to fight in them all. This somewhat fictional 'historical' list sows the very first seeds of doubt of Arthur's legitimacy – or perhaps instead, the origins of a myth.

The next time Arthur crops up is in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, another



Geoffrey of Monmouth recorded (falsely) that Ambrosius Aurelianus ordered the building of Stonehenge

Arthur was a fierce warrior

Although it may be impossible to pin an exact person to King Arthur, it is more likely that his deeds and fighting prowess were inspired by real-world heroes. It is commonly believed that Arthur was based on a Roman warrior who led the British against the invading Saxon forces during the 5th and 6th centuries. The conflict at Badon Hill is mentioned in one of the sources of the Saxon invasion. King Arthur has been linked to this battle but his name was not actually mentioned at all in the original source. The Battle of Badon reportedly saw the Britons halt the Saxon expansion thanks to the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus. It is also written that after the success at Badon Hill all the people of Britain, kings and commoners alike "lived orderly according to their several vocations", indicating a period of great peace and unity after the battle, backed up by archaeological evidence. Because the sources are so limited it is impossible to ascertain any details or legitimacy about the battle, but it does not take a leap of imagination to imagine that if such a victory did occur it would help to inspire the creation of many mighty figures of lore.

King Arthur's legend is linked with the influx of Saxon culture

Edward Burne Jones's famous artwork, *The Last Sleep Of Arthur*

Merlin

Merlin the wizard is a mythological character almost as famous as King Arthur himself, born of a mortal woman and an incubus. Merlin inherited powerful magical powers and became a sage. He then manufactured the birth of Arthur and served as an advisor to the young king. Commonly depicted as a wise old man dressed in a tall hat and long flowing robes, Merlin first appeared in his recognisable form in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* but he is most likely a combination of many mythical figures from Welsh folklore.

One of these was the 6th-century Welsh bard Myrddin – a legendary figure who was an interesting combination of prophet and madman. Monmouth combined this famous mythical figure with the Romano-British war leader Ambrosius Aurenlianus – who many believe was the real life Arthur – and named his character Merlin Ambrosius. The wise old wizard character became very popular and was incorporated into many later adaptations such as a poem by Robert de Boron.

Merlin has since become intrinsically linked to tales of King Arthur and entered the cultural mythology along with him. Despite there being absolutely no historical basis for his existence, many still travel to Brittany to visit his alleged burial place in the legendary forest of Broceliande.

Welsh cleric. In his mammoth chronicle *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Arthur takes on new life and some of the best-known parts of his tale come into being. Apparently based on a lost Celtic manuscript that – conveniently enough – only Geoffrey was able to read, the apparent historical book details the story of King Arthur's life from his birth to his betrayal and death. This is also the first instance we are introduced to some of the most famous people in his story, such as Guinevere and Merlin. The book was an instant success and 200 manuscripts are still around to this day – a tremendous number for a Medieval work, which demonstrates just how successful it was at the time. But why did the Britons take on this tale of an ancient king so enthusiastically? What was it about Arthur's tale that made him so popular?

The answer is pretty simple, but also rather cliché – Britain desperately needed a hero. After the Norman invasion of 1066 the kingdom was in turmoil and it wasn't just Arthur's tale that emerged – a whole host of Celtic literature depicting glorious victories against the invading armies infested common folklore. These tales became interlinked with history, demonstrating the illustrious and noble past of the Celts. Geoffrey's tale of a strong Celtic king who defeated the barbarians and waged war against the Romans, which was subtly and cleverly linked to real-world events, such as the battle of Mount Badon (which Arthur is not mentioned in relation to until *Historia Brittonum*) created the perfect intermingling of fact and fiction for a nation that needed a strong figure to help them keep a hold on their identity.

> Deriving from the Celtic word 'Art', meaning 'bear', it is possible that Arthur was simply a personification of a Celtic bear god

However, it was Arthur's emergence into French culture that gave the tale some of its most notable aspects. When Henry II married Eleanor of Aquitaine, the very English world of Arthur was introduced into the romantic and sublime world of French literature. One of the most famous French writers of the period, Chrétien de Troyes, was enraptured by the idea of the noble warrior king and penned new tales of Arthur and his court, transforming him from a mighty warrior into a leader of a spiritual quest, turning his world from one of blood and steel to courtly romance and the search for the mysterious Holy Grail. The iconic Holy Grail first appeared in Chrétien's poem *Perceval, The Story Of The Grail*, which he claimed was written from a source given to him by Philip, Count of Flanders.

It is unclear whether people in the Medieval era considered Arthur fact, fiction or a mixture of both, but just 100 years after Monmouth's book was published one person was very keen to demonstrate it was as close to fact as it could be – King Edward. It would have been advantageous for the king who led a crusade of the Holy Land to prove his connection to the mightiest and most revered king in British history – Arthur. With his spin doctors demonstrating proof that Edward was a descendant of Arthur himself, it added weight to his right to unite the whole populace, and he successfully subjected a rebellious Wales to English law. In a world where the king's

The Round Table

The Round Table is an icon of Arthurian legend as its shape does not allow a 'head' of the table, giving all present equal status, seen as a perfect representation of the chivalry of Arthurian tales. The legendary table first appears in Wace's verse history *Roman De Brut* in 1155, with the story of Arthur establishing the table to avoid quarrels between barons. The tale has been linked to the Celtic custom of round tables for kings and warriors, as well as Emperor Charlemagne who reportedly had his own round table decorated with a map of Rome. The Round Table inspired tournaments in the Middle Ages where knights masqueraded as characters of Arthur's court for jousting. During excavations at Roman ruins in Chester it was suggested that the Roman Amphitheatre was a prototype for the Round Table, but this claim was later disputed.

Sir Lancelot

POSITION: CHAMPION KNIGHT
MAIN SKILLS: SWORDMANSHIP, BRAVERY

Lancelot began as just one of the Knights of the Round Table, then rose to prominence as Arthur's finest champion, but his affair with Queen Guinevere is believed to have caused Arthur's death and doomed the kingdom. He later becomes a priest in regret of his betrayal.

Sir Percival

POSITION: KNIGHT OF THE ROUND TABLE
MAIN SKILLS: RISING THROUGH SOCIAL RANKS

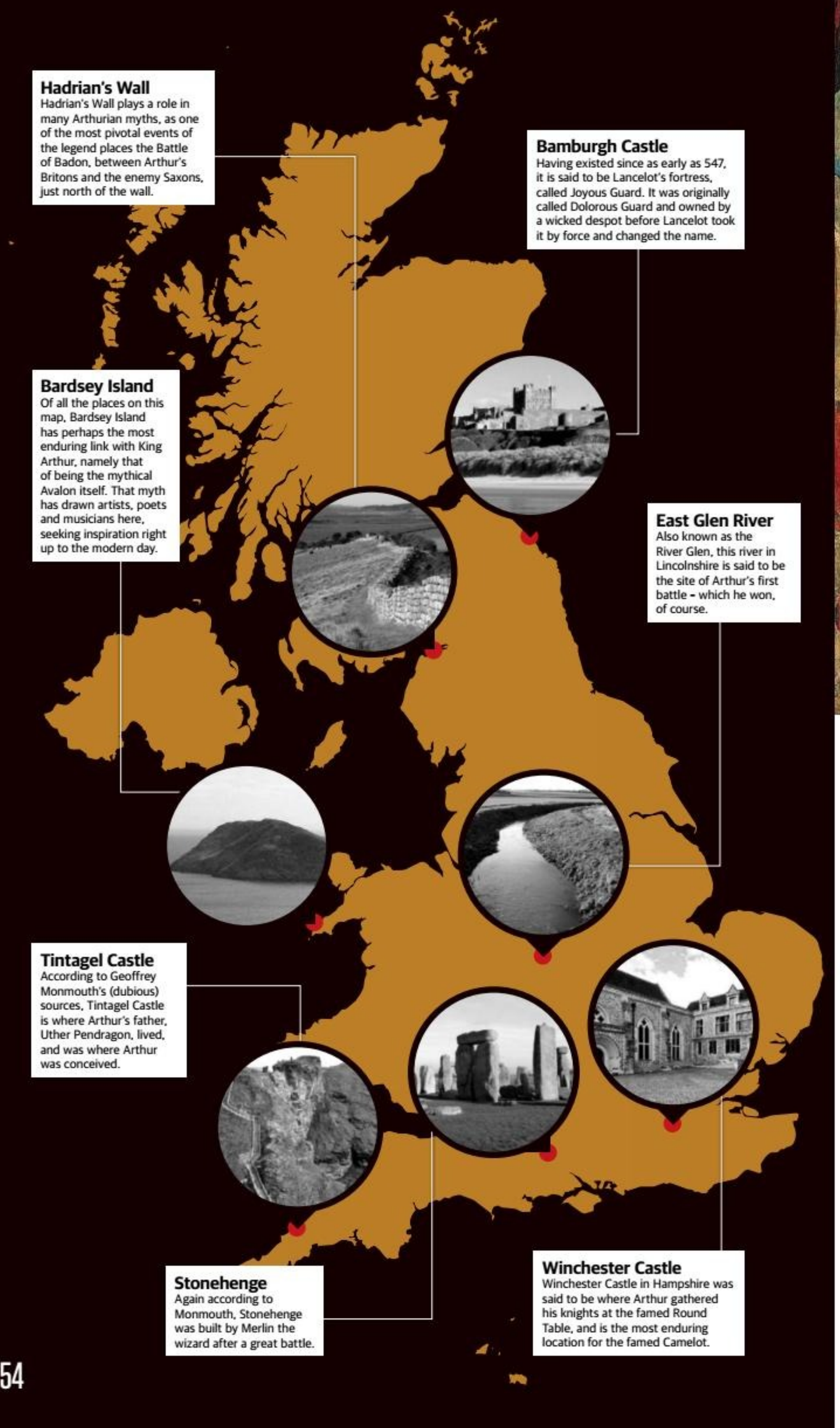
Raised in the woods by his mother, when Percival witnessed passing knights he was inspired to join them. He became involved in the search for the Holy Grail, accompanying Galahad on his quest, in some versions playing the hero himself.

Sir Galahad

POSITION: KNIGHT OF THE ROUND TABLE
MAIN SKILLS: SAVING MAIDENS IN DISTRESS

Galahad was the son of Lancelot and Elaine of Corbenic, who the knights mistook for Queen Guinevere. According to legend, Galahad went on to become one of the greatest knights in the world and ultimately discovered the Holy Grail before ascending to heaven.

Landmarks of the Arthurian legend


Hadrian's Wall
Hadrian's Wall plays a role in many Arthurian myths, as one of the most pivotal events of the legend places the Battle of Badon, between Arthur's Britons and the enemy Saxons, just north of the wall.
Bamburgh Castle
Having existed since as early as 547, it is said to be Lancelot's fortress, called Joyous Guard. It was originally called Dolorous Guard and owned by a wicked despot before Lancelot took it by force and changed the name.
Bardsey Island
Of all the places on this map, Bardsey Island has perhaps the most enduring link with King Arthur, namely that of being the mythical Avalon itself. That myth has drawn artists, poets and musicians here, seeking inspiration right up to the modern day.
East Glen River
Also known as the River Glen, this river in Lincolnshire is said to be the site of Arthur's first battle – which he won, of course.
Tintagel Castle
According to Geoffrey Monmouth's (dubious) sources, Tintagel Castle is where Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon, lived, and was where Arthur was conceived.
Stonehenge
Again according to Monmouth, Stonehenge was built by Merlin the wizard after a great battle.
Winchester Castle
Winchester Castle in Hampshire was said to be where Arthur gathered his knights at the famed Round Table, and is the most enduring location for the famed Camelot.

word was law, Arthur's legitimacy wasn't even brought into question.

Edward wasn't the last king to use the strength of Arthur's legend to cement his own hold on the throne. The Tudor monarchs claimed their lineage could be traced directly to the legendary king and used the power of the legend to prove the legitimacy of their claims to the English and Welsh thrones, vital for a dynasty that originated from an illegitimate child of English royalty.

Henry VIII was a very vocal supporter of King Arthur and the concept of honour, and even commissioned the Winchester Round Table, most likely created in the reign of Edward I, to be repainted with himself in the position of Arthur. Again in the midst of national change during the Industrial Revolution, Britain's monarch called upon the power of the legend of King Arthur, with Queen Victoria using the image of Arthur's chivalrous knights of the realm in connection with Britain's imperialist nature as the empire expanded. Bolstered by the people's faith that Britain was creating a worldwide Camelot, the British Empire grew to become the largest of all time.

It would be easy to assume from this that King Arthur was nothing more than a political ploy, an

A famous depiction of King Arthur and Morgan Le Fey on the isle of Avalon

An artist's illustration of Lancelot and Guinevere

The true location of the mythical Camelot has never been fully resolved

inspirational tale used by opportunists to further the power of British monarchs over the people, but Arthur's influence stretches further than that. More than a political myth, the story of Arthur's righteous and heroic court began to embody Britain itself. During the Middle Ages it was the Arthurian tales of just and noble conduct, of brave knights rescuing maidens in distress, that inspired the knights' code of chivalry. This idea of a knight's duty to his countrymen and fellow Christians launched ships, won battles and changed the political landscape of the world as we know it. This in turn encouraged the creation of a code of etiquette and morals that Britain is, for many, still defined by today.

So did the King Arthur we know of from the tales actually exist – drawing swords out of stones and taking advice from an elderly wizard? Almost certainly not. Although it's highly likely he was based on brave warriors of the era, all the evidence points to King Arthur being borne from the imagination of the men who recorded his tales. But does this mean he isn't real? Not really. Whether he existed or not, King Arthur and his tales of chivalrous victory have had a truly deep effect on British culture, more so perhaps than any living person.

> In a world where the king's word was law, Arthur's legitimacy wasn't even brought into question

The stories of Arthur's life and his thrilling adventures have transcended time, developing into new and innovative forms along with the country itself. From its early origins of a noble warrior beating impossible foes, to a shining light of goodness and justice guiding the soldiers in the trenches of World War I. Perhaps the most remarkable story here isn't of an actual king who rescued maidens and accepted swords from mysterious lake dwellers, but instead the true tale of how someone who didn't actually exist has embedded himself so profoundly in the entire history and culture of a nation that even today, over a thousand years after his creation, we entertain the possibility of him being real.

768 – 814 CE

Charlemagne

The 'father of Europe' and ruler of much of France and Germany, Charlemagne made his name as a king, but left a legacy as the first Roman emperor since the 5th century...

Over 300 years, Europe had fallen into darkness. With the power of the Pope and the once mighty Roman church beset by enemies, the legacy of the western Roman Empire toppled as steadily and as surely as the Caesars had themselves, stability withdrawing like overstretched legionnaires and knowledge fading away like the crumbling Roman roads that cross-hatched the continent.

Europe needed a strong leader to pull it back from the precipice, and it got a brace of them in the form of the Carolingian dynasty, a family of self-made kings who stabilised their lands by force, expanded their frontiers with terrifying aggression and ensured the primacy of the Christian church at the point of the sword. Yet, through this crucible of violence emerged a western Europe reforged to survive another 1,000 years.

By the 6th century, most of what is now France, western Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium was inhabited by the Franks, a Germanic tribe split into several small kingdoms that had rushed into the power vacuum left by the fall of Rome. These petty principalities had been united not by their monarch – rulers in name only, the rois fainéants, the 'do-nothing kings' of the Merovingian dynasty, had been increasingly sidelined by their own ministers – but by the

CHARLEMAGNE

Western Europe, 742 – 814 CE

Brief Bio

Taking the throne of the Franks in 768, Charlemagne rose from relatively humble royalty to a position of greatness. Adding King of Italy to his portfolio in 774, he eventually ruled all of continental western Europe by the year 800. A pious man, his relationship with the church increased his political power.

Charles Martel, grandfather of Charlemagne, defeats the Moors at the Battle of Tours in 732 CE

Mayor of the Palace, the executive of the royal administration who was half-prime minister and half-Shogun-esque warlord.

Pepin of Herstal had warred his way to stability between 680 CE and his death in 714 CE, bringing the other Frankish lands to heel and taking Christianity to their furthest and most pagan reaches. His son, Charles Martel, was a stronger hand yet. Though Pepin had nominated his grandson as successor, Charles – born out of wedlock and excluded from the court – was having none of it, and took the not-quite-throne by force. Despite not being Pepin's choice of heir, he more than honoured his father's vision, expanding the centralised control of the Frank lands and expanding his rule further into modern Holland, Denmark and Germany with a standing army and revolutionary use of heavy cavalry, the foundation of Europe's knights. He defeated the pagan Saxons in the east and halted the advance of the Moors – the North African and Spanish Muslims of the powerful Umayyad Caliphate – who attempted to follow up their conquest of Spain by pushing across the Pyrenees mountains into France. 'Charles the Hammer' was even offered high office by the Pope, which he declined, but it was an omen of his grandson's own journey to come.

Succeeding his father Pepin the Short in 768 CE – who had given up the pretence of being anything other than supreme ruler by forcing the last Merovingian king into a monastery and taking the title of 'King of the Franks' for himself – Charlemagne, which means 'Charles the Great', shared the zeal of his predecessors. At war for most of his life, Charlemagne took Charles Martel's fight against the Moors into northern Spain, continued the conquest and conversion of the Saxons and launched new campaigns against the Lombards of northern Italy, the Slavs in Croatia and Avars in Hungary.

Leading his personal guard, the scara cavalry, into battle with his sword Joyeuse, Charlemagne's exploits have one armoured foot in myth and the other in fact, with separating the two being a difficult task, but his journey from king to the first Roman emperor since the fall of the Roman Empire has little to do with his legend as a warrior king and everything to do with the insecurity of the church.

Pope Leo III succeeded Adrian I on the day of the previous pontiff's burial, so fearful was he that the Frankish king to whom his predecessor owed his lands and safety would feel a right to interfere in the election of the new pope. Yet, despite his wariness he was quick to bring Rome's most powerful ally on side, along with the letter that announced his succession, Leo included the keys to St Peter's Basilica and the Pope's banner. The not-so subtle message was that he viewed Charlemagne as the defender of the Holy See, and trusted him with Rome's protection. The Frank was equally magnanimous in return, congratulating the pontiff and sending vast riches, the spoils of his war against the Avars, but not without condition, suggesting that as he happened to be the stalwart defender of Christianity, the pope had a duty to pray for the Frankish armies as they continued their conquest.

Charlemagne would honour his side of this implied bargain, and in return Leo elevated him to an office left vacant since the 5th century.

While Leo engaged in his letter-writing campaign with the monarch to the north west and used the Avar loot to become a patron of the arts, the family of the late Adrian I launched a conspiracy to remove him from his post and replace him with his nephew Paschal the Primicerius. On 25 April 799 CE, during the procession of The Greater Litanies through the Eternal City, Leo was attacked by armed thugs who stabbed him in the eyes and attempted to tear out his tongue at the root. After dragging him to the church of San Silvestro in Capite and trying to gouge out his eyes again, the bloodied pope was left unconscious as a prisoner at the monastery of St Erasmus. Accused of perjury and fornication by his rivals, the wounded – but amazingly not blinded or voiceless – Leo fled Rome to Spoleto, 126 kilometres (78 miles) north of the city, where under the protection of the Duke of Spoleto he

St Giles pardons the Emperor. Though a popular legend, there's no evidence that the two ever met

"Charlemagne's journey from king to emperor has everything to do with the insecurity of the church"

was able to make his way to Charlemagne at Paderborn in Saxony.

That such a loyal servant of the Frankish king could be found so close to Rome, deep within Italy's central Umbria region, neatly underlines the unbalanced relationship of power between the Franks and the Roman Catholic church that had initially caused Leo such anxiety. Though the territory had been given to Rome in 776 after the defeat of the Lombards, the king retained the power to choose the Duke, making papal control as meaningless as that of the last Merovingian kings under Charlemagne's ancestors.

Clearly, the threat of political interference from Charlemagne had been trumped by that of actual bodily harm, and Leo begged for the monarch's aid. He had no authority to do so – neither he nor the conspirators in Rome were subjects of the Franks, and no law yet existed that would make bishops subordinate to secular authority. With conflict left in Saxony to pursue, Charlemagne let the matter stew for a year and kept the recovering pontiff as his guest. Finally heading to Rome in November 800 CE with a sizeable (and no doubt fairly threatening) entourage, Charlemagne summoned a council of the city's religious authorities and patiently listened to the accusations put to Leo, before allowing the deposed pontiff to make an impassioned plea of innocence.

Unsurprisingly, Charlemange took Leo's side, and ordered the conspirators' executions, but Leo requested that they instead be exiled, with the unpopular pope perhaps seeing an opportunity to impress with capacity for forgiveness.

Crowned 'Emperor of the Romans' on Christmas Day that same year by the grateful pope, the official report insists that Charlemagne was ambushed like some sort of early-medieval surprise party. The king's biographer, the monk Einhard, claimed that his liege had such "aversion [to being crowned Emperor] that he declared he would not have set foot in the church... if he could have foreseen the designs of the pope."

Birth of the modern Europe

3 big ways in which Charlemagne changed the continent

01 Man of letters

Frustrated by his own difficulty in mastering the written word, Charlemagne rolled out a system of reforms to the very shape of writing, insisting on a double space to separate words, an indent at the start of a paragraph and punctuation marks to indicate where the reader should pause or stop. Question marks and lower case letters also appeared.

02 Silver age

Due to a shortage of gold, Charlemagne and the Anglo-Saxon King Offa standardised their currencies based on a pound of silver – in Latin, libra – which was broken down into 20 sous, each of 12 deniers. This is the origin of many global currencies past and present, from the British pound to the Italian lira.

03 Out of the dark

Charlemagne's interest in the arts led to the Carolingian Renaissance, a flowering of art, literature, poetry and learning. The Dark Ages traditionally cover the 6th to 13th centuries, but for the Franks it was over before it began, and 90 per cent of surviving Roman manuscripts do so because monks copied them.

"The way Charlemagne signed his name changed nothing of the way he conducted his affairs"

It's entirely possible that Charlemange and Leo came to some agreement during their year together. After all, the idea of grinning priests hiding a bejewelled imperial crown as if it were a birthday cake is too ludicrous to contemplate. Documents from his reign reveal that Charlemagne preferred using the title 'Charles, the most serene Augustus crowned by God, the great, peaceful Emperor ruling the Roman Empire' rather than the simpler and more often used 'Emperor of the Romans'. These aren't entirely the actions of someone with an aversion to the role, and the king's humility may have been as expertly stage-managed as Leo's mercy.

Nonetheless, with his rule over the Frankish lands uncontested and his empire secured through sheer military prowess, Charlemagne no more needed to declare himself Roman emperor than the fearsome Charles Martel needed to be king, but the vulnerable pope required an emperor to protect him and a vast Empire with the church at its heart. Only Rome had nostalgia for its lost empire, the Franks held their 4th century resistance to Roman rule, and their role in dismembering the Roman Empire as a point of fierce pride.

Ultimately though, the way Charlemagne signed his name changed nothing of the way he conducted his affairs, and the impact of his ascension – reluctant or willing – to Europe's highest office would take another 150 years to make itself fully known.

The first Holy Roman Emperor, Otto I, took the title in 962 CE and reinvented himself in the Frankish king's image, creating a powerful multi-ethnic state and a crown that would endure for over 1,000 years.

Through the Holy Roman Empire, Charlemagne's rule defined not just the primacy of France as one of Europe's imperial, religious and cultural superpowers, but of numerous Austrian, German and Italian states too.

A career that began for Charlemagne as king of the Franks ended not just as emperor, but also as the father of the Europe that we can still recognise today.

Charlemagne orders the construction of a city to ford the River Main – Frankfurt, or Frank Ford

© Getty

849 – 899 CE

Alfred the Great

Warrior, scholar and king of the Anglo-Saxons, Alfred led a great crusade to unite his kingdom and rid it of Viking invaders

In the dark and forboding landscape of 9th century England, the Anglo-Saxon civilisation, which had called the British Isles home for 400 years, stood at the brink of collapse. Brutal warriors descended on English shores from dragon-headed long boats, looking for plunder and bloodshed. Children huddled close to their families inside their thatched long halls, fearing the panicked screams of terrified neighbours – the calling card of these merciless raiders. The Viking horde was not satisfied with just crops or gold, although for rural farmers like the Anglo-Saxons this was bad enough. They wanted to enslave and brutalise the people themselves, and destroy the original Anglo-Saxon society. With the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms divided or conquered, Wessex stood alone against this unstoppable menace. It was in this bleak and embattled world that King Aethelwulf's wife Osburh gave birth to their fifth son at an unremarkable Berkshire village in 849 CE. They named him Alfred and he would change the fortunes of the Anglo-Saxon cause forever.

Alfred was the first King on the British Isles who established a universal set of written legal rights for the people of his lands

Alfred was forced to grow up quickly, learning the ways of an Anglo-Saxon warrior. He was taught to ride, hawk, hunt and most importantly how to defend himself with a shield and kill with a sword. The family he grew up in was a close-knit group and, in keeping with Anglo-Saxon families at the time, many generations of the same kin lived under one roof and passed down their knowledge to the young. While Alfred saw the practical lessons he was learning from his father's warriors as a duty, his real interests lied in the scholarly works his father engrossed himself in. He particularly enjoyed poetry and one story involving this passion showed an unrelenting determination that would follow him into adulthood. His mother had promised one of her five sons an illuminated book of Anglo-Saxon poetry for the first one of them who could memorise the text off by heart. Alfred could not read, so he found a teacher and made him repeat every line in the book until he had it completely memorised. He won his prize and proved to his family that when he wanted something he was willing to do anything to get it.

Boyhood games and poetry recitals came to an abrupt end when a Viking army landed in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of East Angles in 865. Stories of these iron-willed and bloodthirsty warriors had circulated in his father's court and it was widely feared that they were undefeatable. Alfred disagreed, if his years learning about his ancestors and hunting game had taught him anything it was that no enemy was undefeatable. The huge Viking war host led by the fearsome warriors Halfdan and Ivar the Boneless invaded Northumbria, looted York and then turned back to East Angles. The host captured the King of East Angles, Edward, and in a display of power killed him in a ritual sacrifice to their pagan gods. They renamed Edward's realm East Anglia then turned their attention to Wessex and quickly took the small town of Reading in 870.

There was little doubt in Alfred's mind that the terror and destruction the Vikings had wrought across the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms would be brought to Wessex. He and his older brother Aethelred set out to meet them in open combat, mustering men to serve in their army. After days

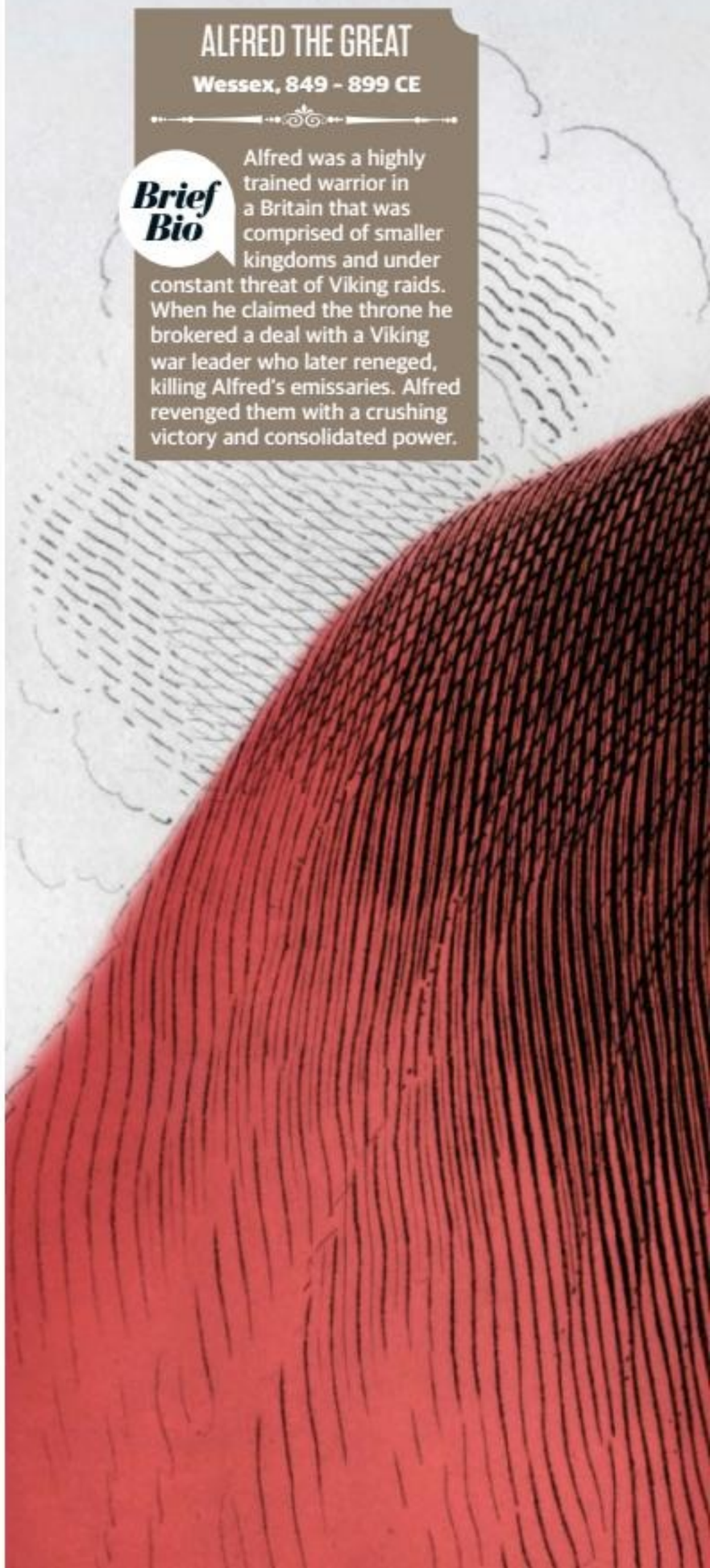
Alfred's scholarly skill was unmatched in the British Isles. He could speak and read Latin and established the first school for the nobility

ALFRED THE GREAT

Wessex, 849 – 899 CE

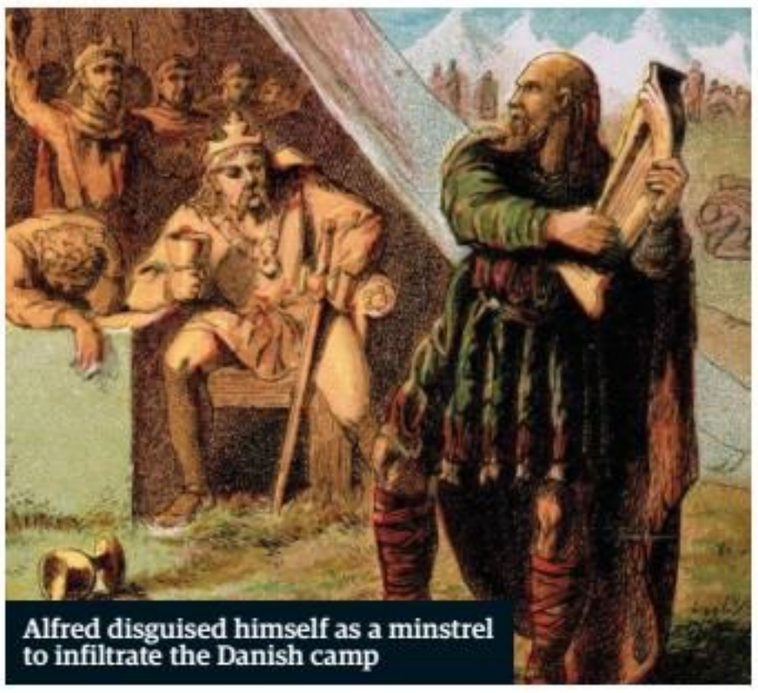
Brief Bio

Alfred was a highly trained warrior in a Britain that was comprised of smaller kingdoms and under constant threat of Viking raids. When he claimed the throne he brokered a deal with a Viking war leader who later reneged, killing Alfred's emissaries. Alfred revenged them with a crushing victory and consolidated power.



"Anglo-Saxons remembered him as 'England's shepherd, England's darling', history honoured him with a far grander title – Alfred the Great"

Alfred's success as King saw him become the de-facto ruler of Mercia and much of the other lands in mainland England



Alfred disguised himself as a minstrel to infiltrate the Danish camp

Alfred the warrior and tactician

Warfare during Alfred's reign was not for the faint of heart. Battles involved thousands of fierce warriors brutally killing each other with swords, axes, maces or any other sharp object that came to hand in uncontrolled melees. Battlefields would run with blood as the victor claimed their prize of crops, loot and slaves from the local populace. The Anglo-Saxon tactic of forming a shield wall to protect their warriors against incoming missiles was partially effective at keeping their soldiers alive so they could close in for hand-to-hand combat, but its effects were limited against a highly mobile foe like the Vikings who specialised in surrounding the enemy quickly. Alfred was aware of this problem and of the relative weakness of mustering a diffuse and at times reluctant community of settlements to stave off encroaching Viking raids. He ordered a fledgling Anglo-Saxon navy built with bigger ships than the Vikings and the construction of a system of forts throughout Wessex known as burhs to allow his warriors to effectively defend their homes from the pagan hordes. He also established a mobile standing army which could respond to foreign threats far more quickly than the hapless local fyrd or army. It also meant that the Vikings could no longer claim land and lordship over the people they conquered, allowing Alfred to consolidate his hold over his own kingdom.

of marching they met the Vikings on a ridge near Ashdown. The Vikings were surprised by the hot blooded aggression of Alfred; he attacked uphill like a 'wild boar' according to the chronicler Bishop Asser, tearing into the Viking lines and causing them to retreat while his brother was still at prayer. It was said afterwards that the field was 'covered in bodies'. After years of plundering the Vikings had finally met their match.

Alfred's triumph was celebrated throughout Wessex, but it was to be short lived. The battle of Ashdown was followed by defeat after defeat; large stretches of Wessex were now under Viking control. It was during these bleak days of 871 that Aethelred died and Alfred claimed the throne of his embattled kingdom. He knew he could no longer defeat the Vikings and attempted to pay them off, affording the realm some respite, but the raids soon continued and in 876 he locked swords with his greatest adversary, the Viking chieftain Guthrum at Wareham. In a siege that involved Alfred using long ships off the Dorset coast to block the Vikings' escape route to the sea, Guthrum was defeated and made to swear an oath of peace to Alfred on a ring of the Viking warrior god Thor. In an act which Alfred would never forget, Guthrum broke his promise, murdered Alfred's emissaries and inflicted a crushing defeat on Alfred's forces at Chippenham during a Christian feast day. It was an act designed to reaffirm Guthrum's commitment to his warrior gods.

Alfred barely escaped with his life, most of his men had been killed or captured by the Viking host and it seemed as if all was lost. He ran into the marshes and spent the next few months evading capture eventually holding up in a peasant's house. A story was told, written in later chronicles, that he was so consumed by the threat to his kingdom that when asked to watch over some cakes by a peasant woman, his mind wandered and they burned. The woman admonished him, saying, "Look here, man, you hesitate to turn the loaves which you see to be burning, yet you're quite happy to eat them when they come warm from the oven.' Rather than punish her, Alfred was said to have acted humbly. The tale not only showed how far the king had fallen but how his troubles had not affected his character.

> Alfred's commitment to Christianity was well known; the pope gave him a piece of what was thought to be the true cross

Rather than accept his kingdom as lost, Alfred gathered his warriors around Southampton and used guerrilla tactics to turn the tables on the raiders until he could nail them down to one last engagement at Edington. It was the greatest battle of Alfred's career. The moment was captured by one of his scribes: 'then the band of bold men was quickly made ready, men brave in battle... warriors marched out, bore banners of victory... heroes beneath their helmets at the break of dawn; the shields rang resounded loudly.' Guthrum lead a huge charge into the Anglo-Saxon forces hoping to smash Alfred and his men with one bold gesture. Rather than retreat, Alfred was determined to stand his ground; there could be no more

Defining moment

Battle of Ashdown
8 January 871 CE

Alfred leads an attack on Viking positions at Ashdown after the Vikings begin to sweep through the area and into Wessex. Knowing that a muster of all available warriors would be the only way to secure victory, Alfred finds a Saraen stone and blows into it. The large boom that this creates musters all the men in the area to battle. The fighting lasts hours as the Vikings and Anglo-Saxons go head-to-head in close combat which leaves hundreds dead but eventually Alfred prevails and the Viking host retreats eastward. The battle of Ashdown becomes Alfred's first victory.

Timeline

849 CE

Birth of a warrior
Alfred is born in Wantage, Berkshire. He is the youngest son of King Aethelwulf and his first wife Osburh. Aethelwulf insists his children succeed to the throne in turn making Alfred fifth in line.
849 CE

Pilgrimage to Rome
Alfred goes on a pilgrimage to Rome where he is made a consul by the pope. He also spends time in the court of Charles the Bald of the Franks where he learns about his greatest enemy: the Vikings.
853 CE

Viking invasion
The Vikings launch an invasion of East Anglia and much of the English mainland is taken by the 'heathen army'. Alfred is made secundarius (advisor) to the king.
865 CE

Marriage to Ealhswith
Alfred marries Ealhswith of Mercia as a way of showing solidarity against the invading Vikings. One account describes her as 'the true and dear lady of the English'.
868 CE

Battle against Ivar the Boneless
Alfred and Aethelred fight the Viking host led by Ivar the Boneless in Mercia. Despite fierce fighting they cannot prevent the Vikings from crushing resistance wherever they find it.
868 CE

Alfred made heir apparent
In order to prevent a succession crisis in the face of the Viking invasion the reigning king, Aethelred, agrees that Alfred should be next in line to the throne despite Aethelred having children.
Janurary 871 CE

defeat. He ordered his men to form an impregnable shield wall, as the Vikings crashed down onto them they were slaughtered on the shields and swords of the Anglo-Saxons. Alfred then led a charge into their camp at Chippenham and made 'great slaughter among them' until they retreated into their fortress and were 'brought to the extreme depths of despair.' Starving and trapped, Guthrum was forced to surrender.

Guthrum and the rest of his Viking army retreated from Wessex for good but this did not mean that they were out of England as a whole. In East Anglia and parts of Northumbria the Vikings had established settlements and were becoming neighbours rather than raiders. Alfred saw this and in an act which showed his keen intellect he forced Guthrum to convert to Christianity and became his godfather. By doing this he insured an oath of allegiance which would guarantee the stability of his kingdom. The Viking threat did not disappear after their defeat at Edington and as a warrior, Alfred knew that an attack on Wessex could happen at any time. He built up his defences and established a system of forts to help protect the countryside; he also instigated new laws based on the Bible which consolidated his grip on power.

His most decisive act during the years after his victories was the consolidation of the rest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms under his leadership. Reasoning that one kingdom united was stronger and more able to resist foreign invasion than a divided land with divided interests, Alfred targeted London, the most important trading town in the whole of England. London was controlled by a Mercian King Ceolwulf who had died at some point after 880 and it is unclear if this was the result of Alfred laying siege to the city. Certainly this would have stained his reputation as England's 'darling' since London at the time was an Anglo-Saxon settlement. Whether London was captured or acquired, the city was brought under Alfred's control in 886. The symbolism of this act along with as his eldest daughter marrying Aethelred the lord of the Mercians united all of Anglo-Saxon England in a tenuous peace under Wessex.

By 890, old age had begun to creep up on Alfred. He suffered from crippling pain in his stomach and it was sapping his strength, along with the complexities of trying to rule a disparate group of settlements in his own kingdom and remain the most influential man in Mercia. Despite this he was determined to continue building his realm by enlightening his subjects. He translated a number of volumes from Latin to English including *The Ecclesiastical History Of The English People* and Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* which instructed bishops on their duties. Alfred's contribution to the development of the English church earned him such recognition that his most committed followers sought to get him canonised.

It is widely thought that Alfred suffered from Crohn's disease which would explain his thin build and ongoing health problems

In 899, Alfred died aged 50, passing on a secure and powerful dynasty to his son Edward. The Anglo-Saxons would remain in a dominant position in England for the next 167 years until another great invasion in 1066 led to the investiture of a Norman King named William. Alfred had secured this legacy through his bravery, skill as a warrior and learned negotiating skills. Anglo-Saxons remembered him as 'England's shepherd, England's darling', history honoured him with a far grander title – Alfred the Great.

Kinship and Lord

Anglo-Saxon society was dominated by bonds of honour and loyalty to kin groups in individual settlements around the country and the tenuous fidelity these groups swore to the nobility and the king. This created a divided realm that only the strongest ruler could call upon in a national emergency.

Invaded land

The Anglo-Saxons themselves were invaders of the British Isles, the Angles and Saxon tribes originated from Germany and Denmark and established settlements across England subjugating the native Britons. In the time of Alfred, the Saxons had fully settled in Britain and were now under threat from the Vikings.

Language barrier

In many ways the British Isles were a cosmopolitan collection of different tribes, all of whom spoke a number of languages and dialects. The Angle, Saxon, Danish, Celtic and Latin languages combined together during this period to form the base of what we now know as the English language.

Divided religion

There was no dominant religion in Europe during this period, Christianity was becoming widespread but various forms of paganism still held sway in many lands including the British and Scandinavian kingdoms. The Anglo-Saxons had converted to Christianity in 601 and referred to the Viking invasion as the 'heathen invasion.'

Warrior society

Every Anglo-Saxon male who was 'free' could be called upon to fight for his home and family at any time by his lord in the fyrd or army. Often these groups would be poorly equipped as individual warriors had to arm themselves, and it took strong leadership to keep these unruly bands together.

Defining moment

Betrayed by Guthrum

876 CE

After a Viking incursion at Wareham in Dorset is defeated, the Viking chieftain Guthrum submits to Alfred and promises to withdraw his forces to Mercia. He seals his promise on a holy ring of the Viking god Thor. Instead of honouring his pledge to the warrior god, Guthrum betrays Alfred and escapes, reassembles his war host and destroys Alfred's army at Chippenham, forcing Alfred to flee into the countryside. The Anglo-Saxon chronicles speak of a dispirited, battle wary and lonely Alfred seeking shelter with peasants.

Defining moment

The Battle of Edington

878 CE

In the greatest battle of Alfred's career, Alfred confronts his old enemy Guthrum for the last time on the field of battle. The battle is a desperate struggle for the survival of Alfred's kingdom. Much of Wessex is now under threat from the Viking horde assembled in the northern part of the kingdom. Alfred orders his men to form a dense shield wall, a common tactic used by Anglo-Saxon armies and together they hold firm against the Viking tide which sweeps onto them. He wins a spectacular victory and pursues the Vikings to Chippenham where they surround and starve them out, forcing Guthrum to surrender.

Crowned king
After the death of Aethelred, Alfred is crowded King of Wessex. Word is then received that the Vikings have won more victories within the kingdom. Instead of fighting them, Alfred strives for peace.
23 April 871 CE

Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum
Alfred signs a treaty with Guthrum which gives the Vikings control of East-Anglia on the condition that Anglo-Saxon rights are respected and the Vikings stop taking slaves from Wessex townships.
880 CE

A gift of the true cross
In recognition of Alfred's true piety, Pope Marinus I presents a gift of what he believes to be a piece of the true cross as well as other priceless treasures to Alfred and his court.
883 CE

London liberated
Alfred takes control of London through a disputed action which may have involved him laying siege to the area. He gains de-facto dominance over all Anglo-Saxon territory by taking the most important trading city in the British Isles.
886 CE

The law codes
After studying Latin, Alfred presents to his kingdom a collection of laws put together in a 'dooms book' which is based on Christian teachings from the Bible. He uses these laws to strengthen his influence in the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.
893 CE

899 CE

Death of a hero
Alfred dies in 899 aged 50, ensuring a secure land for his lineage, and Wessex as the dominant player of the three Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in England. He is remembered as Alfred the Great.
899 CE

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1066-1087

William I

From the illegitimate son of a duke to the holder of the English crown, William I conquered detractors, kings and even the odds to become one of Britain's most memorable rulers

In 1028, William was born into a period rife with violence and disorder. Despite every nobleman owing fealty to the King of France, many duchies and fiefdoms were in constant flux as political alliances chopped and changed at a moment's notice. France itself had been at war with its rival Flanders for years, creating an intense air of conflict across much of Western Europe.

William's social status was also of some contention. His father, Robert I, Duke of Normandy, never married his mother, Herleva of Falaise, so the young Norman was born a bastard. However, William would be Robert's only child, so the presence of his father's blood was strong enough for the duke to name him as his heir. So serious was he about it that he gathered a group of Norman magnates in January 1034 to swear fealty to William as Robert's true successor. Soon after, Robert left on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Over a year later, Robert fell ill on his return from the Holy Land and died in Nicaea, Greece. And so, at the age of eight, William inherited one of the most powerful political positions in France.

The first few years of William's tenure as Duke of Normandy were surprisingly smooth, mostly due to two considerably powerful supporters – namely his great-uncle Archbishop Robert and the king of France, Henry I. Such influential allies enabled William to retain the fealty over the Norman nobles he'd inherited from his father, but such support was not meant to last. With the king preoccupied with the costly conflict with Flanders, and Archbishop Robert passing away in March 1037, William's duchy soon descended into chaos.

> Blood ties were common in the royalty at the time. Edward the Confessor was William's first cousin, once removed

Eventually a group of William's detractors formed an uneasy alliance and led a revolt against him. Led by his cousin, Guy of Burgundy, the revolters attempted to capture the duke at Valognes, a commune in northwestern France – however, the duke escaped and sought refuge with the French king. The duke may have been young, but the title of king was quite the trump card to play.

William returned to Normandy in the early months of 1047 with King Henry at his side and their armies consolidated into one considerable force. The rebel army outnumbered William's, but it lacked the leadership provided by the king's own elite. The Battle of Val-ès-Dunes descended into a number of skirmishes, but the rebel army soon

WILLIAM OF NORMANDY

Normandy, 1028-1087

Brief Bio

Whether he's remembered as William the Conqueror, or by the lesser-known moniker William the Bastard, he was one of Britain's most influential monarchs. With Viking blood in his veins, he united his Norman homeland with the feudal fiefdoms of England, but faced a battle to maintain his new crown.

Despite his influential position in the history of the monarchy, no authentic portrait of William is in existence

During his reign, William crossed the Channel about 19 times

The White Tower is the central structure of the Tower of London and was started by William the Conqueror

Life in the time of William I

A nation divided

When William became king, he discovered a government far more complicated than Normandy's own. The country was divided into shires and counties, with these territories further divided into wapentakes (an old Norse word that refers to small meeting places).

Strength in stone

During his early reign, William commissioned a number of castles, keeps and mottes (a wooden or stone structure erected on raised earth). One of the most memorable of these was the White Tower, which remains the central structure of the Tower of London.

The hunting king

According to the medieval chronicler William of Malmesbury, William depopulated large swathes of land in the south of England in 1079 (36 parishes to be precise), to create the royal New Forest for hunting.

Forging ties

With his alliances and political standing in Normandy, William forged long-lasting ties between England and France that lasted for much of the Middle Ages (despite political and military clashes). His Viking roots also created a closer bond with Scandinavia.

The royal family

William had nine legitimate children with his wife, Matilda of Flanders. His sons were Robert, Richard, William and Henry, his daughters were Adeliza, Cecilia, Matilda, Constance, Adela and Agatha.

"William's forces were able to rout Harold's men like cattle. And after nine or so hours of battle, the fight was over"

broke apart and William finally established his authority over the Duchy of Normandy.

When William finally turned his attention to the kingdom across the Channel, his claim held more merit than most. The English monarch at the time, King Edward I, had named William as his successor (they were, in fact, distant cousins) and a chance meeting with the most powerful earl in England, Harold Godwinson, in 1064/5 also secured his support should the duke move to inherit the throne. According to William of Poitiers, a French priest who served as the official chronicler of William's invasion, the duke had the backing of almost all the lords and earls in Normandy as well as the backing of the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry VI. He even had the support of the pope, if Politer's claims are to be believed. Either way, over a period of around seven months, he gathered a fleet of 600 ships with roughly 7,000 men (2,000-3,000 of these were cavalry). It was an impressive force designed for one thing: to conquer a kingdom.

William finally made landfall on 28 September 1066. They had arrived at Pevensey in the south of England, but William soon sent an envoy to London to speak with the Anglo-Saxon king.

Reports state that William was around 5'10", which was incredibly tall for a man of this time

Harold had just returned from repelling another invasion by the King of Norway, Harold Hardrada, and had rushed back to the capital after hearing of the Norman incursion. William told Harold that his claim to the throne was invalid and that he should relinquish the throne immediately or allow the pope to make an absolute decision. Harold, unsurprisingly, declined and the two leaders met in Hastings on 14 October 1066.

The Battle of Hastings was a bloody affair. Reports and speculations from historians differ on the size of Harold's army but a majority agree that it was roughly the same size as William's. The only real differences? Diversity and exhaustion. Despite a brief stop in London, Harold had marched a great deal of the army he used to defeat Harold Hardrada in the north down to the south in just two weeks. Despite their training, the men were fatigued and in no state to face a fresh Norman contingent. Harold's forces were almost entirely made up of infantryman, which was likely the deciding factor in the battle. With plenty of archers and cavalry, William's forces were able to rout Harold's men like cattle. And after nine or so hours of battle, the fight was over. Harold was dead and William was now the de facto King of England.

Defining moment

William is double-crossed
January 1066

In the years leading to his death, Edward the Confessor named William, the Duke of Normandy, as his future successor. However, although William did visit England a couple of times in Edward's final years, it was difficult for him to leave the delicate political ecosystem back in Normandy. When the king died, Harold Godwinson (sometimes simply referred to as Henry Godwin) took advantage of William's absence and, against the late king's wishes, claimed the crown for himself. The Godwins were one of, if not *the*, most powerful and influential families in England at the time. Henry would be the last Anglo-Saxon king of England.

Timeline

1028

William is born
While the exact date of his birth remains an issue of contention among historians, we do know that he was born in Falaise. He was the only son of Robert I and Herleva of Falaise.
1028

Inheriting the duchy
When he was round the age of seven or eight, William's father Robert passed away. With his death, the title of duke and its political responsibilities fell to the young boy.
1035

William and Godwinson meet
Harold Godwinson, who later became King Harold II of England, was shipwrecked off the coast of Normandy. William and Henry met during this time and Henry endorsed William's claim to the English throne.
1064

The invasion begins
After assuring his affairs were in order in Normandy, William arrived at Pevensey in the South of England with a large invasion force. Once all of his troops had disembarked, William led his force into Hastings.
28 September 1066

Following his coronation on 25 December 1066, William discovered that presiding over a duchy was a world away from ruling a kingdom. Defeating Harold at Hastings and taking the capital should have cemented his position, but William's arrival was more than just the ascension of a new king – it was the end of the Anglo-Saxon era.

William was careful not to upend the social equilibrium of England's nobility, but a backlash was inevitable. William fought to contain a series of revolts in Dover, Exeter, Hereford, Nottingham, Durham and York, but it was the revolt led by Edgar the Atheling that was the most severe – not only in its potential threat, but also for how aggressively William dealt with it.

The revolt centred on Edgar the Atheling, the only remaining individual with a legitimate claim to William's seat of power. And when Sweyn II, King of Denmark, offered his support in 1070, the Norman grip on the north was broken. The region began to destabilise with revolts and civil unrest, and Edgar and Sweyn's forces soon took the key stronghold of York. William immediately marched from Nottingham with his own forces to settle the rebellion, but by the time he got there the revolt had all but dissolved. Edgar fled to Scotland and Sweyn left suitably paid off by the king. However, William was far from a mood to grant clemency.

He and his troops scoured the land from York to the borders of Scotland in Northumbria. So severe was the devastation that William enacted on the north that the Domesday Book (which was conducted in 1086) revealed that around 100,000 people died from starvation alone following William's 'harrowing'. Considering the census revealed the population to be 2.5 million, such a figure shows just how far the new king would go to burn his legacy into England's history books.

The Harrowing of the North, as it came to be known, was just one of the many conflicts William had to deal with throughout his 21-year reign. He was continually dealing with issues with his neighbours (such as his clashes with the king of Scotland in 1072), rebellions among his own gentry (namely the Revolt of the Earls in 1075) and even quarrels with his own children. Between his native duties as Duke of Normandy, and as King of England, William was forced to solidify his legacy with political marriages, truces and military force.

By the time of his death on 9 September 1087, William had maintained his authority over both Normandy and England for over two decades. He built over 50 castles and fortifications during his reign, determined not only to remind the people of the land who their monarch was, but to protect the nation from the very act he'd taken the throne with. While his acts of domestic growth and merciless violence have been largely overshadowed by his invasion, the man himself remains a defining figure on those storied pages.

Even though King Harold's forces had defeated one invasion and marched hundreds of miles from Newcastle to the south, they still fought valiantly in the face of William's superior cavalry and archers

The Domesday Book

In the years that followed the taking of the English crown, it became clear that official records relating to population and landholding were nearly nonexistent. Almost 19 years after his invasion, while spending Christmas in Gloucester with his advisors, William decided a census was needed. It seems likely it was planned as a way to determine how to restructure taxes across the nation. The Domesday Book (or The Great Survey as it was known then) was split into two documents; the 'Little Domesday' (which covered Suffolk, Essex and Norfolk) and the 'Great Domesday' (a larger document that covered the rest of the country). Interestingly, these documents did not cover the entire nation. This was for many reasons – for example, Westmorland and Cumberland were absent as both formed part of the Kingdom of Strathclyde until they were conquered by his son, William II, in 1092. Elsewhere, London and Winchester were left out because of their special tax status, while the County of Durham was omitted because the Bishop of Durham held ecclesiastical rights to tax that county.

Defining moment
The Battle of Hastings 14 October 1066

Prior to the main battles with the invading Normans, King Harold had already exhausted his military forces defeating *another* invading force led by Norwegian monarch Harold Hardrada at Stamford Bridge. Interestingly, King Harold knew that William was coming before Hardrada's Scandinavian force arrived, however, the Norman forces remained moored off the coast for almost seven months before disembarking. Accounts relating to the size both forces differ greatly, but it's assumed they were leading armies of between 7,000 and 10,000 men. William's forces are ultimately successful, using the considerable number of cavalrymen and archers to wear down the English contingent. King Harold died on the battlefield after taking an arrow to the eye.

Defining moment
Harrowing of the North 1070

William had defeated or outlived most of the legitimate claimants to the English throne, but one still remained. Edgar the Atheling had a great deal of support in the north of England and when Sweyn II of Denmark landed in 1069, Edgar's claim became a real threat. In 1070, he paid the Danes to leave and began to attack the land around Edgar's supporters. Over the next few months he destroyed livestock and farmland, and killed (according to reports) thousands of men, women and children. William's aim was to ensure they would never, ever revolt again.

The Great Survey
In order to determine the true worth of his English kingdom (and to unravel the holdings and lands of his earls) William commissioned a countrywide consensus. While not every part of the nation was covered, it still serves as the most detailed record from the Middle Ages.
1086

William takes London
Despite defeating the king and the remainder of his standing army, England was far from won. Earls and lords loyal to the English king barred William's entry into Winchester and London but the Norman usurper soon overwhelmed them and took control of the royal treasury.
October-November 1066

Crowning a new king
With most of Harold's supporters either dead or in flight, William was crowned King William I of England. One of his first actions was to reaffirm the titles and lands of many earls but strip those of Harold's supporters.
25 December 1066

Returning to Normandy
After his coronation, William returned to Normandy to ensure his lands were intact. While there, he had a number of new monasteries built. He also met with most of his nobles and earls, all of whom were eager to learn of possible new wealth and holdings.
1067

Hereward the Wake
Despite promising to leave England for good, Sweyn II of Denmark returned a few months later and joined the growing uprising led by northern theign Hereward the Wake. William forced Sweyn to leave yet again and soon brought this, the last of the northern revolts, to an end.
1070

1087

Death of a king
Despite the relative military success of his reign, his final days were remarkably uneventful. While on a military expedition against France, William either fell from his horse or became ill and died soon after.
9 September 1087

1122 – 1204

Eleanor of Aquitaine

How the Duchess of Aquitaine survived two husbands and her warmongering children to become the most powerful woman in Europe

In 1173, Henry II was confronted with unbelievable news: three of his sons had taken up arms in rebellion against him, backed by King Louis VII of France. To make matters worse, they were supported by their mother and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

This act of defiance may have come as a surprise to Henry, but he should have known what she was capable of it. He was aware when he married Eleanor that she was a woman of power, pride and ambition who would not let anything stand in the way of the greater good for her or her sons. This fiery temperament and willingness to confront her problems publicly had already caused trouble for her first husband.

Eleanor was born to one of the most powerful men in Europe: William X of Aquitaine. The Aquitaine territories were vast, encompassing roughly a quarter of all of medieval France, and the kingdom had a reputation for hosting cultural, religious and material riches. When William died, she inherited it all. William had decreed that King Louis VI of France would act as her guardian in the event of his death, prompting Louis, who knew an opportunity when he saw one, to arrange her engagement to his son, Prince Louis, with the wedding taking place on 25 July 1137. While William and Eleanor made their first trip around France as newlyweds, Louis VI passed away. Between them, Louis VII and Eleanor now had France and Aquitaine under their control.

The match of territories might have been harmonious, but the union between Louis and Eleanor was not a happy one. In her marriage agreement, Eleanor made sure that she retained control of Aquitaine, at least until a male heir came of age. Perhaps more importantly, their personalities were completely incompatible: Eleanor loved to travel and took great joy in the cultural and social opportunities her position allowed her; by contrast, Louis lived and ate simply, and it was obvious to everyone at court that he was intimidated by Eleanor.

The death blow to their marriage came when Eleanor insisted on accompanying her husband on the Second Crusade in 1147. His failures and their public arguments led to scandalous rumours about them both and, despite marriage counselling from Pope Eugene III, Louis and Eleanor grew further and further apart. A male heir might have been their saving grace, but when their efforts resulted in two daughters, they had their marriage annulled. Eleanor was now aged 28 and in need of a husband.

Eleanor of Aquitaine is often credited with creating a Court of Love at Poitiers, although there's no historical evidence to support this theory

Although we might assume that she would relish her freedom, Eleanor's power and possessions put her in a very dangerous position. When she set out into the French countryside, there was a real danger that she might be kidnapped and forced to marry by men with designs on her kingdom. She had to make her way through the Loire Valley without being recognised or waylaid. If she was going to marry again, this time the decision would be hers.

She settled on Henry Plantagenet. At this time, he was the Duke of Normandy, but his plan to take the throne of England, then occupied by King Stephen, was about to come to fruition. He was younger than Eleanor, but his ambition and fiery temperament matched hers, and her power, standing and renowned beauty were attractive to him. In 1152, Eleanor wrote to Henry and asked him to marry her instead of mounting his invasion

When Eleanor fled to marry Henry, she had to avoid being kidnapped and forcibly married by his brother Geoffrey

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE

France; England, 1122 – 1204

Brief Bio

As Queen Consort of France from 1137 to 1152 and then Queen Consort of England from 1154 to 1189, Eleanor co-ruled some of the most powerful territories in medieval Europe. The beautiful and charismatic queen was a strong leader, but above all she protected the interests of herself and her children.

"Eleanor was a woman of power, pride and ambition who would not let anything stand in the way of the greater good for her or her sons"

The Third Crusade

Once Richard I took the throne of England, his thoughts turned quickly to the glories of war, and the opportunity arose to prove himself in the Third Crusade. When Saladin, the sultan of Egypt, took Jerusalem in 1187, Richard, Frederick Barbarossa of Germany and King Philip of France joined forces to take back the Holy Land.

Their attack got off to a terrible start when Frederick drowned while crossing a river, prompting much of the German forces to turn back. However, Philip had lost none of his crusading zeal, and led the attack on Acre. A siege ensued, with Richard arriving nearly a year after it began. Brutal, criminal methods of violence were used, including the massacre of 2,600 Muslim prisoners, eventually forcing the city's surrender in 1191. Saladin paid off Richard and Philip not to sack the city, but by this point Philip had lost his enthusiasm and, tired and jealous of his companion, returned home. Richard stayed on until 1192, attacking Jerusalem but he eventually realised that the time had come to leave. He had become aware that John was plotting his downfall at home and, after a final stunning victory at Jaffa, he signed a three-year truce and sailed for England. He left behind a legacy of atrocity, but had created a legend for himself as Richard 'the Lionheart'.

of England. He hurried to meet her, and they were wed on 18 May, uniting the kingdoms of Normandy and Aquitaine. She soon became pregnant, and Louis' humiliation would be compounded when Stephen died and Henry was crowned king on 19 December 1154.

The bustling metropolis of London provided Eleanor with culture and entertainment. She had long been renowned for her patronage of the arts, and it was a role she continued to play. Henry was determined to produce heirs, and although her first son, William, died at the tender age of three, she bore four living children by the end of 1158 (Henry, Matilda, William and Geoffrey), and by 1167 she would have a further three (Eleanor, Joan and John). They would be his downfall.

Henry manoeuvred his children like chess pieces, giving and taking away power when it suited him. His eldest, Henry, known as 'the Young King', was vain, proud and easily manipulated. When his father gave Henry's youngest brother John castles that he wanted, Henry left for the court of Louis VII, his father in law.

Richard's rebellion was almost certainly fuelled by his mother. There have been many reasons given as to why Eleanor, who had been at her husband's side for 20 years, would encourage rebellion; his incorrigible cheating, for example (leading to the well-known story of Queen Eleanor and the fair Rosamund). The most likely explanation is that she resented being sidelined, and the fact that Henry clearly wanted control of Aquitaine. The kingdom was owed to Richard, Eleanor's favourite child, and she would do anything to protect his interests.

> Eleanor was a tremendous patron of the arts, and Aquitaine was renowned for its music, art and culture

Eleanor rode out to join her three sons at the court of her first husband from Poitiers. She understood the danger that she was in, and disguised herself as a man in an attempt to avoid recognition. It did not work. She was captured and arrested, and the scandalous news about her open rebellion against her husband became public knowledge. She remained imprisoned at Chinon until the rebellion was over and some months after, and her husband crushed his sons' uprising. In July 1174 he had her moved to Salisbury Castle. Although she was kept comfortable and made the occasional public appearance, she was moved from castle to castle and was not allowed to leave England. Most distressingly, she was not permitted to visit her homeland of Aquitaine.

The years passed, and Henry the Young King continued to prefer the company of foreign monarchs. Henry II attempted to pacify him in 1182 by forcing Richard and Geoffrey to pay homage to him. Richard, now Duke of Aquitaine, refused, and the Young King rebelled. It was a poorly thought-out campaign, ending with his death on 11 June of dysentery. Henry II then requested that Richard give Aquitaine to John. Richard refused once more, and Henry released Eleanor and instructed his son to surrender Aquitaine back to his mother. When Geoffrey died in 1186, his close friend King Philip II of France began to plot war against Henry II. He began negotiating with Richard, and the Duke of Aquitaine did homage to the King of France in 1188. A year later, they attacked Henry's territory together. Stunned, the king acknowledged Richard before his death.

Defining moment

The Second Crusade
1147-49

Eleanor had agreed to provide troops from Aquitaine, but insisted on travelling with them to help treat the wounded. The king grew jealous of her close relationship with her uncle Prince Raymond of Toulouse, who was a far more capable military commander. Rumours sprang up that they were engaged in an incestuous relationship, and her rows with Louis led many to believe that Eleanor was sabotaging the Crusade. In fact, it was Louis who made the final fatal error by insisting that they press on to attack Jerusalem. The assault failed, and so had their marriage.

Timeline

1122

Eleanor of Aquitaine is born
Eleanor is born to William X of Aquitaine and Aenor de Châtellerault, and proves to be intelligent and vivacious. Her mother and older brother both die when she is four, in the process leaving her as the sole inheritor of her father's will.
1122

Eleanor marries Louis
The kingdoms of France and Aquitaine are matched when Eleanor agrees to marry Louis, the son of her guardian and the French King. Louis' father dies days after their marriage, creating a powerful union.
25 July 1137

Eleanor marries Henry
In a move that humiliates Louis, Eleanor marries Henry, his rival and the Duke of Normandy. He is younger than she is, but they share a common ambition, and their united kingdoms are a threat to Louis.
18 May 1152

Henry is crowned King
Eleanor and Henry's powers continue to grow when Henry invades England's territories and King Stephen dies, leading to his coronation as king of England. The kingdoms of Normandy, Aquitaine and England are now united.
25 October 1154

Eleanor is imprisoned
Following her open support of her son's revolution, Henry II keeps Eleanor as his prisoner, rarely allowing her to make appearances at court and forbidding her to leave the country. She is moved from castle to castle.
1174

With Richard now on the throne of England, Eleanor returned to power once more. Richard understood that he was in an unstable situation, and needed someone he could trust to keep a hold of the reins while he was away. Eleanor was the perfect choice. Her years of imprisonment had not dampened her wits, and she remained fiercely protective of her son. Soon after he was crowned on 13 September 1189, Richard joined the Third Crusade with Philip while Eleanor kept a close eye on her ambitious son, John.

Not only did Eleanor watch over her son's kingdom while he was away; she travelled all over Europe to promote their diplomatic interests. She journeyed over the Alps in the depths of winter of 1191 to accompany Berengaria of Navarre from Pamplona to Sicily to marry Richard. Eleanor understood how powerful her reputation was, and took the opportunity to conduct diplomatic business on her travels, impressing foreign courts with her presence.

On her return to England, she had to deal with John. When William Longchamp, the man who had been left in charge of the country's security, failed in his task, John leapt at the chance to condemn him and was appointed governor in his place. It was only Eleanor's control over her son that kept outright revolution at bay, but Richard was captured while attempting to return home from the Crusades in November 1192. She oversaw the attempts to free her son, including the raising of ransom money, and she delivered the payment in person to Germany. Perhaps more impressively, she convinced the proud Richard to submit to the Emperor as his vassal to secure his freedom.

Having returned, Richard forgave John and secured his allegiance, but tragedy struck when, in 1199, he was mortally wounded at the siege of Châlus-Chabrol castle. Eleanor rode across France to be at her son's deathbed. John was now king of England, and Eleanor did not let his past actions affect her behaviour.

She helped to secure his kingdom by recruiting mercenaries to crush the rebellion of his grandson Arthur, and securing the territories of her son and herself. She continued to travel in the interests of diplomacy, making a final trip to northern Spain, where she had chosen one of her grandchildren to be the bride of King Philip's son, Louis. Eleanor lived to the age of 82, continuing to act in the interests of her son and of Aquitaine. When she died, it was a heavy loss to both. Her fiery temperament and fierce protectiveness of her children had propelled Richard I into power and kept John in it. She had been a diplomat and an icon, a prisoner and a patron of the arts, not to mention the most powerful woman in Europe.

When Eleanor died in 1204, she had reached the venerable age of 82 and had outlived all but two of her children

Defining moment

Richard is captured 1192

Richard was aware that his journey home from the Third Crusade was not going to be easy. He had caused offence to some of the most powerful men in Europe after denying them spoils and marriage alliances, and his brutal conduct was notorious. His route was cut off at several points, eventually forcing him to disembark in the Adriatic and journey across land. He was caught in Vienna, where Austrian Emperor Leopold sold him to German Emperor Henry VI. He was kept prisoner until 4 February 1194, when Eleanor ransomed him for 100,000 marks.

Life in the time of Eleanor of Aquitaine

Thomas Becket is assassinated

Henry VIII might have severed England's ties with Rome, but Henry II had similar, if less radical, ideas. He wanted England to have more independence from the pope, but Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket refused to sign the legal documents, and their disagreements worsened. On 29 December 1170, Becket was brutally murdered in Canterbury Cathedral.

The first troubadours

The first historical use of the word 'troubadour' is to be found in the 12th century in the Occitan region of southern France. The troubadours were lyrical poets who performed their songs – often at court – about love and chivalry. They have long been associated with Eleanor of Aquitaine.

The Knights Hospitaller

This legendary fighting unit was formed in the final years of the 11th century, and were key to both the Second and Third Crusades. The Knights Hospitaller, or Knights of St John, were monks who would tend to the wounded and dying before becoming their own military and religious order. The three ranks were the brothers infirmarians, brothers chaplains and the military brothers.

First leper hospital

Disease and sickness were terrifying prospects in the Middle Ages, and one of the most terrifying contagions was leprosy. Anyone who became afflicted with the disease was shunned and cast out of the city, but there were exceptions. The first recorded leper hospital was St George's outside of Copenhagen, where it operated from 1109 until 1609.

The longbow is developed

Warfare and its technology underwent a revolution during the 12th century, from Japan, where the Samurai pledged to serve the Shogun, to Wales. It there that historians believe the first longbow was invented, which would in later years prove crucial in England's wars against the French.

Henry demands return of Aquitaine
When Richard refuses to give Aquitaine to his brother John, Henry knows he will only listen to one person: his mother. Eleanor is forced to request for the return of Aquitaine, to which her son reluctantly agrees.
1183

Richard is crowned
Eleanor makes a triumphant return to the political arena when Henry II dies, allowing the ferocious Richard to claim the crown for himself. She looks on proudly as her favourite son takes control of the realm.
6 July 1189

Eleanor transports Berengia of Navarre
Eleanor proves invaluable to Richard, her diplomacy and reputation counter-balancing his warmongering. She agrees to transport Berengaria of Navarre across the Alps to marry her son.
1191

Richard dies
After all of her efforts to keep his kingdom out of John's hands and free him from his German prison, Richard is killed while laying siege to a castle. Eleanor hurries to his deathbed, and is with him when he dies.
6 April 1199

Eleanor is captured outside Poitiers
Despite her age, Eleanor is vital to John's reign as King, touring Europe on diplomatic missions. She is captured outside Poitiers by his enemies, but her son hurries to her aid and frees her.
1199

1204

Eleanor dies
At the age of 82, Eleanor dies at Fontevraud Abbey, where she had become a nun. She is buried there alongside her second husband and her favourite son, leaving behind her legacy as the most powerful woman in Europe.
1204

© Look and Learn

1167 – 1216

King John

Revolt, treachery, excommunication: how the last Angevin king, born to inherit nothing, won and lost an empire

Standing upon the banks of the Thames in the water-meadow at Runnymede on 15 June 1215, it would have been difficult for King John, brother of Richard I and inheritor of the Angevin Empire, to not reflect upon the events that had led him there. With lands lost in France, civil war dividing the kingdom, London fallen to rebel barons and a damaged relationship with the church, John was forced to sign a treaty that would reduce the crown's power and grant new rights to church and state.

The fifth and youngest son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, John was nicknamed "Lackland" by his father as the chances of him inheriting significant lands seemed slim. This was a nickname that would gain an ironic twist towards the end of his reign. John's fortunes changed in 1173, however, when three of his brothers, "Young" Henry, Richard and Geoffrey, revolted against their father in protest at Henry's proposed distribution of lands among his sons. The rebellion failed and John became the favoured son, a status that led to his appointment as Lord of Ireland in 1177 and opened up the possibility of becoming heir to his father's throne.

But it was not to be; attempts to alter the plans for succession in the wake of Young Henry's death in 1183 angered brother Richard, who refused his father's request to pass the Duchy of Aquitane to John. Though forced to reconcile at the time, the hostility between Richard and his father remained, and Richard ultimately went on to seize the throne six years later.

Richard left England to join the Third Crusade, buying John's loyalty in his absence with lands and titles. John used this time to develop his own power and influence, taking advantage of growing tensions between Richard's appointed officials by brokering promises of support with England's nobles and proposing an alliance with King Philip II of France. A failed attempt to seize the crown for himself in 1193 resulted in John losing many of his titles upon Richard's return. Fortunately for John, Richard forgave him, seeing the attempted rebellion as little more than a youthful indiscretion.

> Often portrayed as a tyrant, modern opinion suggests John was actually a capable ruler brought low by the treachery of others

The final years of Richard's reign saw an outwardly loyal John work hard to reclaim favour in his brother's court and win back much of the power he'd lost.

Following Richard's death in 1199, John was favoured over Arthur, John's nephew and Richard's stated heir, and crowned king. Arthur withdrew to France, swearing fealty to Philip II, while John settled into his new role as king.

The Angevin Empire, established by his father and maintained by Richard, now comprised the Kingdom of England, parts of Ireland and around half of France, including the duchies of Normandy, Gascony and Aquitane; this was territory that Philip intended to bring back under French rule.

KING JOHN

England, 1167-1216

Brief Bio

Portrayed in modern culture as a weak and greedy ruler thanks to his merciless taxation of his subjects, King John's character can, in fact, be seen in a different light. He was a skilled military leader whose rule of England and its continental lands was defined and disrupted by internal disputes and rebellion.

John's second marriage produced five children, though he is believed to have fathered as many as a dozen illegitimate children

The Magna Carta, written in medieval Latin and agreed to and sealed by King John in 1215

The Magna Carta

The Magna Carta was a document written to satisfy the grievances of England's barons and the church by clearly defining their rights and responsibilities, as well as those of the king. The agreement covered such topics as the giving of heirs in marriage and a widow's right to choose not to re-marry, the handling of debts following a debtor's death, and the introduction of standard weights and measures for wine, ale, corn and cloth.

Of particular note though were the promises that no free man would be imprisoned except by lawful justice, nor would they be denied the right to justice. There were also restrictions placed on the use of taxation by the king and his barons, including the formation of a council that could approve or reject proposed taxes and monitor the king's compliance with the terms of the charter. Although the charter was ultimately rejected by both John and the rebel barons, it would later be revised and reinstated after the king's death. Many of its edicts still remain intact in English law to this day.

"With England and Aquitane secured against possible French attack, John focused on building his forces"

In 1200, John's 11-year marriage to Isabella, Countess of Gloucester, was annulled so that he could marry Isabella of Angoulême, sparking a dispute that would define the rest of his reign. Conflict erupted along Normandy's eastern border between John and Hugh de Lusignan, Isabella's then-fiancé. de Lusignan's subsequent appeals to Philip II over John's actions, and John's refusal to answer Philip's summons left the French king with little choice but to punish John. He seized Normandy and reassigned John's lands in France (of which Philip was recognised as feudal overlord) to Arthur. The loss of Normandy, and with it the majority of England's continental territory, was unacceptable, and John was determined to take it back, whatever the cost.

With England and Aquitane secured against possible French attack, John focused on building his forces ready to recapture the lost lands in France. This required money, and John put more and more pressure on the English barons to provide the finances he needed, breeding increased discontent among the barons, particularly those in the north who felt far removed from John's campaigns in France. Baronial unrest delayed John's attempt to mount an expedition to Normandy in 1205, forcing him to depart for France with a much smaller military presence than he had hoped for. Further funds were needed to forge alliances with Renaud of Boulogne, Count Ferdinand of Flanders and Otto IV, John's nephew and aspirant to the crown of the Holy Roman Empire in Germany. With these allies, John hoped to push forward with his attempt to retake Normandy from Philip, but in 1212 once again his progress was halted by unrest in England.

Signing the treaty of Le Goulet in 1200 earned John the nickname "Softsword" for his willingness to bow to Philip II

Seeing an opportunity, Philip sent his son Louis to invade Flanders, with the aim to push on to England's shores. Redeploying his forces to meet this new threat, John destroyed Louis' fleet, but again his plans had been disrupted and further taxes were levied to keep John's campaign in France viable. The whole series of events pushed tensions back home closer and closer to breaking point.

John's final French campaign began in 1214, though it was with significantly diminished support from many English barons, who refused to supply soldiers for John's war effort. In their place, mercenary regiments were hired to strengthen John's armies. The initial stages of the campaign progressed well – John pressed Louis' forces and retook Anjou, but was forced to retreat when the local Angevin nobles, whose loyalty lay with their feudal lord Philip II, refused to advance with him. The final blow to John's hopes of retaking Normandy came

Defining moment

Rebellion against Richard I
1193-1194

John takes advantage of Richard's capture and imprisonment by Emperor Henry VI while returning from the Third Crusade by allying with Philip II of France and attempting to take Richard's crown for himself. Opposed by the forces who were loyal to Richard, John's rebellion is unsuccessful and he is forced to surrender upon Richard's eventual return.

Richard forgave John's attempted rebellion, but stripped him of much of his power as punishment

Timeline

1166

Birth of a king
John, fifth and youngest of Henry II's sons, is born on Christmas Eve at Beaumont Palace in the city of Oxford.
24 December 1166

First Lord of Ireland
Henry II grants lands captured in Ireland to John, naming him Lord of Ireland at just 10 years old, and temporarily alleviating the problems Henry faced in providing suitable lands and titles to all his sons.
1177

An unhappy union
John marries his betrothed, Isabella, Countess of Gloucester. However, as cousins, the laws of consanguinity lead the Pope to forbid them from having children together.
1189

A king against the odds
John is crowned at Westminster, supported by English nobles and denying his nephew Arthur's claim to the throne.
1199

Treaty of Le Goulet
John and Philip II sign a treaty recognising Philip II as suzerain of John's lands in France. This is in return for Philip's recognition of John as Richard's heir and King of England.
1200

Wedding bells and death-knells
Conflict erupts in Normandy with the Lusignans over John's decision to marry the already-engaged Isabella of Angoulême. The Le Goulet peace treaty, which lasts just two years, ends in open war.
1200

at the Battle of Bouvines in July, in which Philip defeated John's allies under the leadership of Otto IV. Otto was deposed, Renaud and Ferdinand were captured, and Philip took control of Brittany and Normandy. John was forced to concede defeat, sign a peace treaty and return to England.

News of the failed campaign did little to settle the growing tensions in England, and soon barons in the North and East were organising resistance to John's rule. John arranged discussions with the rebels, though whether this was born from a genuine wish to reconcile, or an attempt to stall any potential conflict until he had received official support from Pope Innocent III, was unclear. By the time Innocent's letters arrived, the rebels were ready to act, marching on London. The capital fell, as did Lincoln and Exeter, and the rebels' successes prompted more barons to throw their lot in against the crown. John's position was desperate, and with his only option being to agree to peace talks, a meeting was arranged. The date was 15 June 1215. The place, Runnymede.

The peace agreement created by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, would later be known as the Magna Carta, and it would shape English law for years to come. In addition to resolving baronial complaints, the charter defined the rights and freedoms of the barons, the citizens, the church and the king. The king's ability to impose taxation was restricted, the church would be allowed to appoint its own officials without interference and a council of barons would be formed to monitor the king's adherence to the charter. In return, the rebels were to surrender London to John and withdraw their forces.

John rarely took communion and was said to have made blasphemous remarks and jokes about the church

The charter failed. The rebels, believing John would not abide by the agreement, refused to stand down. In turn, John, claiming to have signed the charter under duress, sought help from Pope Innocent III, who declared the charter to be "shameful, demeaning, illegal and unjust" and excommunicated the rebel barons. The stage was set for the First Baron's War.

Faced with the strength of John's armies, the English barons sought assistance from another quarter – Prince Louis of France. The rebels had early successes, taking the castles at Rochester and Canterbury and gaining control of much of Kent. John enjoyed similar success against the northern barons and Alexander II of Scotland and won control of many of the disputed northern territories. With the north contained and rumours of Louis' imminent arrival in the south, John turned back to meet the coming threat. Louis landed in Kent in May 1216 and marched on London unopposed, though his attempts to take Dover and Windsor by siege proved unsuccessful. John withdrew to Winchester before pushing towards Cambridge and north in an attempt to divide the rebels of Lincolnshire and East Anglia. With Alexander II marching south to pledge his support to Louis, John turned west once more, enduring a disastrous crossing of the Wash's estuaries, which saw much of his baggage train, including the crown jewels disappear.

By the time John reached Newark Castle, he was suffering from dysentery and could go no further. He died there on 18 October 1216. His kingdom, a pale reflection of the empire it had been 16 years earlier, passed into the hands of his heir.

A 14th century depiction of King John in battle with Prince Louis of France

Life in the time of King John

Soldiers of fortune

John made extensive use of foreign mercenaries. Though more expensive to employ, mercenary contingents could fight year-round. By comparison, feudal troops were restricted by fixed-term service, providing greater tactical flexibility.

Scutage

Scutage was a form of taxation that allowed a knight to buy his way out of military service. John's use of scutage as a legitimate form of taxation at times when the threat of military conflict was not apparent was one of many sources of discontent among his barons.

Dysentery

Dysentery thrived in the Middle Ages, aided by a lack of proper sewage control, poor understanding of hygiene and an abundance of spoilt food. Doctor-approved treatments for dysentery at the time included consuming barley water, eggs and even lead.

The Feudal System

Feudalism was a tiered order of governance, from the king down. Instigated by William I in 1066, when he divided the freshly-conquered Saxon lands among his barons, the system would last until the 17th century.

Persecution of the Jews

Many Jews of the Middle Ages held significant wealth and acted as money lenders. They were widely disliked by the nobility and their protection under the king left them vulnerable to heavy taxation whenever the crown needed to raise emergency funds.

Defining moment

Excommunication
November 1209

Following a dispute with Pope Innocent III over the church's appointment of the new Archbishop of Canterbury, John is excommunicated. Although John reacts by seizing English lands and money held by the church in England, he ultimately reconciles with the Pope in 1213, fearing the possibility of a Papacy-backed French invasion. Innocent becomes one of John's greatest supporters, discouraging the French from attacking and providing official support during the Barons' Revolt in 1215.

Defining moment

Laying down the law
15 June 1215

Forced into conciliatory action by both the church and England's rebel barons, John signs the Magna Carta at Runnymede, agreeing to abide by its restrictions on royal power and the freedoms it grants to the church and the citizens. These covenants would shape England's laws for centuries to come. John would go on to claim the charter was unlawful and signed under duress, prompting the barons to revolt in protest and leading to the First Barons' War.

A broken empire
War with King Philip II and Arthur in France results in the loss of the majority of the ancestral Angevin territories John had inherited from his brother and father.
1202

A son and heir
John's wife Isabella gives birth to their first son, Henry III, who would inherit his father's kingdom nine years later.
1207

Battle of Bouvines
John's final attempt to reclaim Normandy ends with the destruction of his allies at Bouvines in Flanders. John and King Philip II agree to peace and he returns home defeated.
1214

The First Barons' War
Civil war erupts in England as Pope Innocent declares the Magna Carta unlawful, releasing John from its rules. The barons revolt.
1215

1216

Death of a king
Suffering from dysentery, John dies at Newark Castle. Rumours at the time attribute his death to many things, such as poisoned ale, plums and an indulgent "surfeit of peaches".
1216

© Alamy

1455–1487

Henry VI and the War of the Roses

In war, blood is power, blood is family, blood is everything. England's War of the Roses split a country in two and saw the rise and fall of no less than four monarchs

It was 1453 and England was still at war with its old enemy France. Since the legendary days of King Henry V, the warrior king who spilled the blood of the noble enemy in spades at Agincourt and secured England's claim to the tactically important province of Normandy, both great western powers had been fighting nonstop, with England slowly but surely being pushed back toward the English Channel. English King Henry VI's military affairs were being overseen by the Duke of Somerset Edmund Beaufort, an experienced military commander who was about to suffer the ignobility of losing Bordeaux and leaving Calais as England's only remaining territory on the shores of mainland Europe.

Back in England, Henry VI – shy, pious and noncombatant – was busy being dominated by his powerful and ruthless wife, Margaret of Anjou, the niece of the French King Charles VII, as well as his feuding court nobles, with Henry cow-towing to both and leaving the affairs of England and his estate in a paralysing limbo. Amid this turmoil, a year previously the Duke of York, Richard Plantagenet, had travelled to London with an army to present the court with a list of grievances that they and the king were failing to address. This potentially explosive situation had been handled by Margaret and with the news that she was now pregnant, it helped to re-isolate York and force him to leave the capital with his tail between his legs.

When King Henry VI was told of the final loss of Bordeaux he suffered a mental breakdown. Completely unaware of who he was, what was going on around him and how to act toward people, Henry finally let the last tentative grip of control he had over England slip through his fingers. No longer was Henry the softly spoken and pious king of old, but instead a dazed half-man, stumbling around his home and court, unable to speak cogently and liable to sudden bouts of hysteria and aggressive confusion.

Henry's ethereal grasp on reality would go on to last an entire year. Margaret dealt with him as best she could, shielding him from the circling vultures at court and making all decisions regarding the rule of the nation for him. However, even she couldn't shield him from his own demons, with the king repeatedly heard screaming in the depths of night and continuously stricken with bouts of amnesia. When Margaret eventually gave birth to their son Edward, Henry's mental state was so deteriorated he didn't recognise him. Due to this incapacity, even his wilful and powerful wife Margaret was unable to stop the return of the Duke of York and his supporters, a group that now included Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick, one of England's major financial and political powers. A Council of Regency was set up and power taken by Richard as Lord Protector of England. Once installed, he immediately imprisoned his old enemy, the Duke of Somerset, and backed all nobles opposing Henry, shifting the balance of court in his favour. The weak king had seemingly been deposed.

While the king was still alive – even if he was sometimes little more than a gibbering wreck – Richard's position was always perilous and when, on Christmas Day 1454, Henry suddenly and inexplicably regained his senses the balance of power in this game of thrones shifted yet again. The king had gone from not being able to recognise anyone, laughing maniacally on his own to the quiet and shy ruler of old almost overnight. With Henry now recovered, his queen lost no time in challenging York for the throne and quickly re-established Henry and herself at the centre of court. Never one to shy away from a confrontation – and well aware of the danger he presented – the queen began scheming to remove Richard from his reduced but still influential position, colluding with other nobles to discredit him and undermine his power and influence.

Margaret knew how to work the political system, which relied largely on the noble households. Richard soon found himself increasingly bypassed when it came to decisions, relegated away from London and, harried by Margaret at every turn, he found his allies slipping away. Finally, in early-1455, he decided that enough was enough and anticipating impending arrest for treason, raised an army and marched toward London. By the standards of the military might that was to come, this army of roughly 7,000 men may have been small, but there was nothing small in the statement that it made: the battle lines between the two great noble houses of England and their supporters had been drawn and the country held its breath, preparing to be plunged headfirst into chaos.

Richard Plantagenet was now not just contending for control at court but as the nation's king, and his loyal nobles gathered round him as the leader and figurehead of the House of York. Opposing him directly was Margaret of Anjou and her king, with the former now effectively the leader of the House of Lancaster. While the split in support for the two opposing sides wasn't just decided by geography,

"Completely unaware of who he was, Henry finally let the last tentative grip of control he had over England slip through his fingertips"

A depiction of Henry VI with the Dukes of York and Somerset

Battle for the Throne

The key players in the bloody quest for ultimate power

York

The first cadet branch of the parent House of Plantagenet, descended down the male line of the house from Edmund of Langley, the 1st Duke of York and the fourth surviving son of King Edward III. Three of its members down the ages became kings of the country. The house came to an end when Henry Tudor established the House of Tudor at the close of the Wars of the Roses.

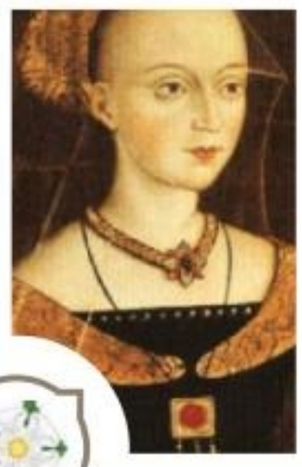
Main supporters: Prince of Wales; Lord of Ireland; Dukes of York, Clarence, Gloucester.

Emblem: A white rose.

Claim to the throne: Richard Plantagenet was descended from King Edward III.

Duke of York
Richard Plantagenet

Date of birth: 21 September 1411
Strengths: Powerful and well connected; inherited large estates and influence in England and France.
Weaknesses: A series of military victories led him to overconfidence, ensuring his own death in a crushing defeat at the Battle of Wakefield.
POWER RATING: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



Queen Consort
Elizabeth Woodville

Date of birth: 1437
Strengths: Politically slick; married well above her station, aggravating the family's rivals, and was a renowned beauty
Weaknesses: Not powerful enough to hold the throne for her children; let her power be usurped by Lady Margaret Beaufort in later years.
POWER RATING: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Earl of Warwick
Richard Neville

Date of birth: 22 November 1428
Strengths: A principal politician in England, he deposed two kings to earn the nickname 'the Kingmaker'.
Weaknesses: Let his dominant position at the English court be gradually eroded in later years due to directing his focus toward France.
POWER RATING: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Lancaster

The second of two junior branches of the mighty royal House of Plantagenet, the House of Lancaster was created with the establishment of the Earldom of Lancaster by Henry III of England in 1267. From that date the House of Lancaster provided England with three kings, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI before becoming extinct with the execution of the latter's son, Edward Prince of Wales, by the rival House of York during the Wars of the Roses.

Main supporters: Earls of Lancaster, Leicester, Moray, Ferrers, Derby, Salisbury, Lincoln; Duke of Lancaster

Emblem: A red rose.

Claim to the throne: Its figurehead was Henry VI, the only son of Henry V.

King of England
Henry VI

Date of birth: 6 December 1421
Strengths: Son of the powerful and popular Henry V; married well to the French-born Margaret of Anjou, was generally considered benevolent and pious.
Weaknesses: Bouts of crippling mental illness saw his kingdom ruled by others during his reign for extended periods of time.
POWER RATING: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Queen Consort
Margaret of Anjou

Date of birth: 23 March 1430
Strengths: Passionate, proud and strong-willed, Margaret provided the House of Lancaster the scheming and ruthless ruler Henry VI failed to be.
Weaknesses: Overstepped her power level in the Battle of Tewkesbury, leading to her ultimate fall from grace and power.
POWER RATING: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Duke of Somerset
Edmund Beaufort

Date of birth: 1406
Strengths: Head of one of the most influential families in England. Experienced and respected by his peers.
Weaknesses: Poor temperament, lost more battles than he won; let a personal feud with the Duke of York get violently out of hand.
POWER RATING: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Two Houses Divided

Follow the family trees of two historic nobles' houses

House of York

Anne De Mortimer
1390-1411

The mother of Richard Plantagenet and grandmother of King Edward IV and King Richard III, Anne de Mortimer was descended from royalty through her mother and grandparents. She died of childbirth.

Richard of Conisburgh
1375-1415

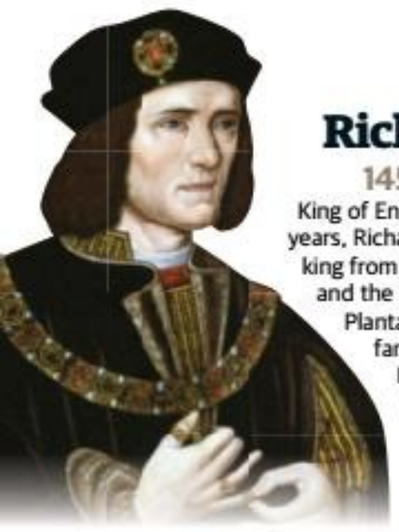
The father of Richard Plantagenet and husband to Anne de Mortimer, Richard of Conisburgh was the 3rd Earl of Cambridge and a prominent figure in the Southampton Plot against Henry V. He was caught and executed.

Richard Plantagenet
1411-1460

The son of Anne de Mortimer and Richard of Conisburgh, Richard of York became a key Yorkist leader during the early parts of the Wars of the Roses, winning numerous battles and even becoming Lord Protector for a time.

Cecily Neville
1415-1495

The wife of Richard Plantagenet, Cecily Neville was the Duchess of York and was well known for her beauty and piety. She gave birth to two later kings of England, Edward IV and Richard III. She outlived her husband by 35 years.



Richard III
1452-1485

King of England for just two years, Richard III was the last king from the House of York and the last of the House of Plantagenet. Richard was famously defeated by Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field.

Edward IV
1442-1483

The first Yorkist king of England, Edward IV ruled the country in two spells, from 1461 to 1470 and then after an overthrow and subsequent restoration, from 1471 to 1483. He was succeeded by his younger brother Richard III.

Elizabeth Woodville
1437-1492

Spouse of King Edward IV from 1464, Elizabeth Woodville was one of the most powerful women in England during the Wars of the Roses. She gave birth to the Princes in the Tower and Elizabeth of York, future wife of Henry Tudor, King Henry VII of England.

Edward V
1470-1483

One of the famous Princes in the Tower, Edward V was a son of Elizabeth Woodville and uncrowned king for just 86 days. He was succeeded infamously by his uncle and Lord Protector, Richard of Gloucester, later King Richard III of England.

Richard of Shrewsbury
1473-1483

The second son of Elizabeth Woodville and King Edward IV, Richard was the second famous member of the Princes in the Tower. Richard was almost certainly murdered along with Edward and disposed of in secret.

Edward V and Richard of Shrewsbury (the Princes in the Tower) were imprisoned in the Tower of London and most probably executed

House of Lancaster

Owen Tudor
1385-1461

A Welsh soldier and courtier, Owen Tudor was descended from a Welsh prince, Rhys ap Gruffudd. After fighting at Agincourt he was awarded English rights and went on to serve in the household of Catherine of Valois after Henry V's death. They were possibly married in secret in 1429.

Catherine of Valois
1401-1437

Queen consort of England from 1420 to 1422, Catherine of Valois was the daughter of Charles VI of France. She was married to Henry V in 1420. In December 1421, she gave birth to the future Henry VI. Later, after Henry V's death, she went on to form a relationship with Owen Tudor.

Henry V
1386-1422

The famous warrior king of England who scored a famous victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt, Henry V was the second English monarch to stem from the House of Lancaster after his father, King Henry IV.

Henry VI
1421-1471

Henry VI was the third king from the House of Lancaster. He became king at just nine months old. He suffered from periods of madness throughout his life and was deposed by Edward IV and the House of York.

Margaret of Anjou
1430-1482

The wife of Henry VI, Margaret of Anjou was the niece of Charles VII. Widely held to be responsible for the Wars of the Roses after excluding the Duke of York from the Great Council in 1455.

Edward of Lancaster
1453-1471

The only child of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou. After the battle of Towton he was exiled in France with his mother. He was killed in battle in Tewkesbury.

Edmund Tudor
1431-1456

Edmund Tudor was the first son of Owen Tudor and Catherine of Valois. Henry VI made him the Earl of Richmond in 1452. He married Margaret Beaufort in 1455.

Margaret Beaufort
1443-1509

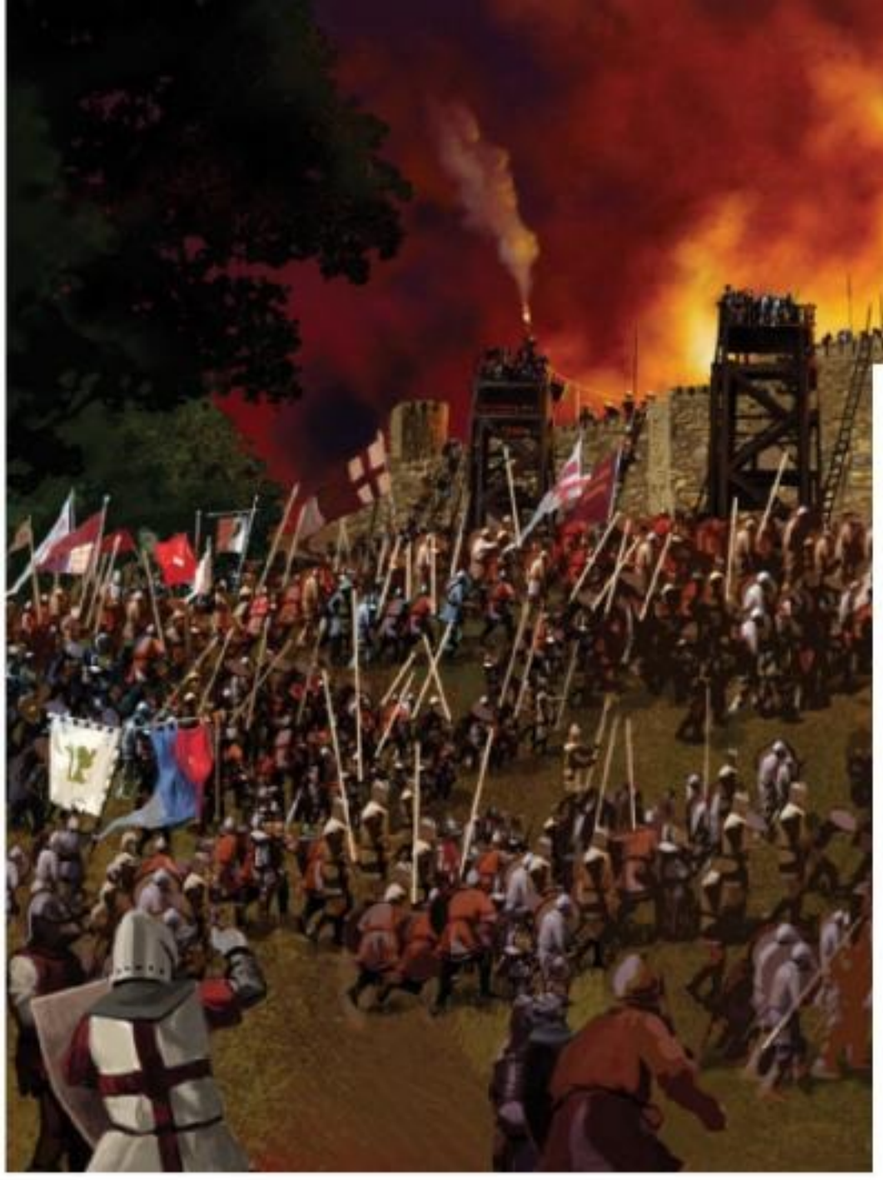
Margaret Beaufort was the daughter of the Duke of Somerset and the great-great granddaughter of King Edward III. She gave birth to the future Henry VII at just 13 years old.

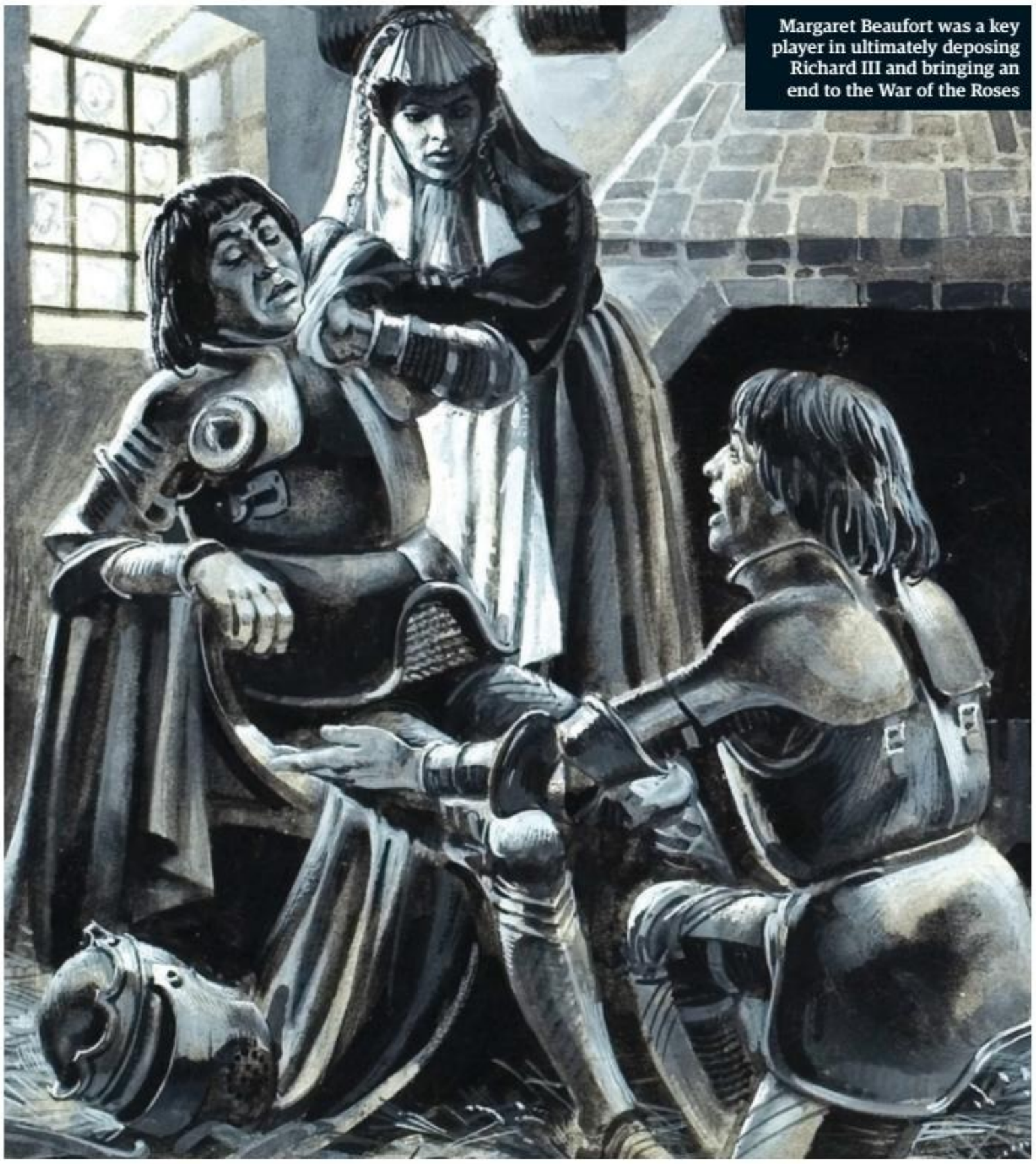
Elizabeth of York
1466-1503

The only daughter of Elizabeth Woodville, Elizabeth of York played a key part in ending the Wars of the Roses, marrying the Lancastrian ally Henry Tudor on 18 January 1486, establishing the Tudor Dynasty.

Henry VII
1457-1509

The only child of Edmund Tudor and Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII spent years in exile before defeating Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. He married Elizabeth of York, thus uniting the Houses of York and Lancaster, ending the Wars of the Roses.





Margaret Beaufort was a key player in ultimately deposing Richard III and bringing an end to the War of the Roses

with nobles from all parts of the country siding with one house or the other due to a series of complex and often long-standing allegiances, although with Richard marching down from the north where he had recruited much of his army, it seemed like the north was coming to claim what it believed was rightfully its property in the south. To many of the nobles supporting the House of York they were marching on the capital with their knights, infantrymen and archers to remove a weak king from power and restore order to a country on the verge of disintegration and collapse.

Even the staunchest of Henry VI's supporters would have been forced to admit the country had seen better days. Following a series of French victories over the English on the continent, they had grown confident and had begun raiding English supply lines and vessels in the Channel. In addition, due to the years of warfare England was in poor financial shape, while the absence of a strong king had led to London's political scene descending into a series of arguments, squabbles and petty confrontations. A weakened country was slowly bleeding to death from infighting, so in marching on the capital Richard Plantagenet intended to wrestle back some semblance of control over it.

The king might have been largely blind to the threat of the Duke of York but, luckily for the House of Lancaster, the ever-vigilant and ruthless Margaret was not. She quickly drummed up support for a hastily assembled army to counter the threat from Richard's forces. Margaret dispatched this army under the command of her favourite and a sworn enemy of Richard, Edmund, Duke of Somerset. The king was also sent along with the army and, judging by the comparatively small size of the Lancastrian army (roughly 2,000 men), it seemed Margaret expected that there would be no hostilities, with some sort of peace treaty the likely outcome and the status quo maintained. The beautiful and resourceful queen was wrong, though. Spectacularly so.

Margaret was first married to the Duke of Suffolk's son, John de la Pole, in 1444, then only a year old

"Richard Plantagenet was now not just a contender for control of England but also its kingship, as the leader and figurehead of the House of York"

The two armies came together at St Albans just north of London on 22 May 1455, and after a couple of minor skirmishes, the first battle of the War of the Roses broke out. Richard's Yorkist force quickly cut down the Duke of Somerset as well as Lancastrian loyal nobles Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and Lord Thomas Clifford. Turning a defeat into a catastrophe, Henry VI himself was also captured, personally apprehended by Richard's key ally Warwick's forces as he hid in a local tanner's shop, abandoned by his advisers and servants and seemingly suffering from yet another debilitating mental breakdown.

The following day, York and Warwick marched with the now-mad-again king in their custody to London. Redepositing the unfortunate Henry with Margaret, Richard retook the position of Lord Protector and he and Warwick began to re-establish themselves. An uneasy truce of sorts followed, with both sides plotting to overthrow the other but failing to act decisively. Warwick became captain of Calais – an important and powerful

The Bloodiest Battle: Towton

Towton was not only the most brutal battle of the War of the Roses but also one of the most decisive. These are its climactic events:

7. Rivers run red
The victorious Yorkists chase down and kill any fleeing Lancastrians. As many of the Lancastrian soldiers had removed their armour and helmets in order to run faster, they are picked off by archers, while those who escape the arrows are checked by the once-protective marshes and River Cock.

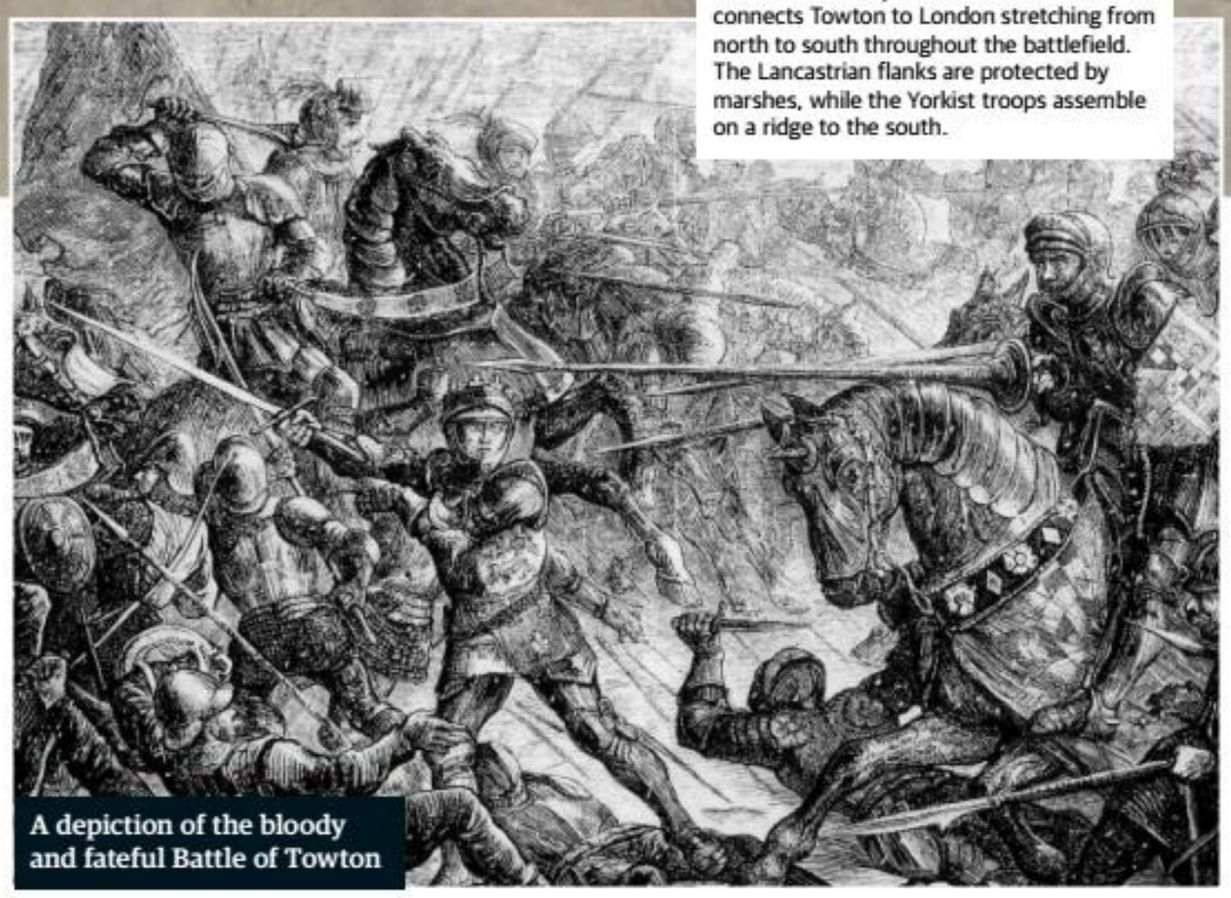
6. Lancastrian collapse
Slowly, despite fierce resistance in which thousands of Yorkist soldiers are cut down, the Lancastrian lines begin to disintegrate. Eventually, Somerset's left flank collapses and a rout begins, with the remaining Lancastrian men turning and fleeing.

5. Norfolk rides to the rescue
Just as the Yorkists are about to be defeated and King Edward IV lost in battle, the Duke of Norfolk John de Mowbray rides onto the plateau with his troops, reinforcing the Yorkists and preventing their collapse. Soon the Lancastrian forces are driven backward.

1. Old London Road
The Yorkist and Lancastrian forces deploy themselves on a plateau, with the road that connects Towton to London stretching from north to south throughout the battlefield. The Lancastrian flanks are protected by marshes, while the Yorkist troops assemble on a ridge to the south.

2. Opening barrage
As the Lancastrian forces of Henry Beaufort are in a sound defensive position, he gives the order to hold position. The first move of the battle is ordered by the Yorkist leader Lord Fauconberg, as their longbowmen to step forward and unleash a volley of arrows. The Lancastrians return their own volley, but the wind direction causes it to fall short.

4. Meat grinder
The two sides keep pushing into each other in a melee that continues for over three hours, with thousands of soldiers cut down, their bodies littering the battlefield. Gradually, the outnumbered Yorkist lines are overwhelmed, with the balance of power falling in Somerset's favour.



A depiction of the bloody and fateful Battle of Towton

"Edward joined forces once more with his father's old ally, 'the Kingmaker' Warwick, and rode forth toward the north armed with a deadly army of over 30,000 men"

8. Henry flees
Somerset as well as a few other surviving Lancastrian nobles manage to escape the battlefield and news of the defeat is sent to Henry VI. He flees straight away to Scotland with his wife Margaret of Anjou where he is joined by Somerset.

3. Lancastrian charge
Under assault by Yorkist arrows, Somerset orders his troops to charge up the hill. Advancing through a rain of arrows, the Lancastrians lose many men, but reach the Yorkist lines and engage them in melee combat, cutting down hundreds of soldiers.

Lancaster

Troops: 35,000
Losses: Unknown (Total dead across both armies: 28,000)

Leader: Henry VI
Strengths: Strong claim to the throne of England, being the only child to King Henry V.
Weaknesses: Periods of debilitating insanity. Also quiet, shy and unsuited to warfare.

Key supporter:
Duke of Somerset
Strengths: Experienced military commander with steady judgement.
Weaknesses: Political amateur; had a habit for switching sides.

Secondary unit:
Footsoldier
Strengths: Numerous and gritty fighters when on the battlefield.
Weaknesses: Not always well trained or equipped enough.

York

Troops: 30,000
Losses: Unknown (Total dead across both armies: 28,000)

Leader: Edward IV of England
Strengths: Extremely capable and daring military leader. Good fighter on the battlefield.
Weaknesses: Poor foresight and inconsistent political judgement.

Key supporter:
Lord Fauconberg
Strengths: Established military commander and knight. Politically savvy.
Weaknesses: Disloyal and mercenary.

Secondary unit:
Longbowmen
Strengths: Fabulous range and stopping power with armour-piercing arrows.
Weaknesses: Vulnerable in melee combat and ineffective in poor visibility conditions.

position – but once again Henry VI recovered his mental strength and took his royal progress (a tour) into the Midlands in 1456, establishing his court in Coventry. By this point, the country effectively had two different kings, an unsustainable state of affairs. In this court, the third Duke of Somerset, Henry Beaufort was emerging as the favourite, with plans struck by him and Margaret to roll back all the appointments York had made while Lord Protector and to degrade Warwick's influence on state affairs. The situation was balancing on a knife's edge; one sudden move, one perceived threat, and the whole country would rapidly descend into all-out civil war.

It took three years, but that the peace would end was as inevitable as the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening. The move that would shatter the precarious peace came in 1459, when York and Warwick were summoned to a royal council in Coventry by Henry VI and Margaret and, fearing foul play and a potential threat to their lives, refused to go, instead grouping together with their supporters at the strategically vital Ludlow Castle, right on the Welsh border. This was the starting pistol for the beginning of the bloodiest civil war England had ever seen. The Battle of Blore Heath was first, then the Battle of Ludford Bridge, followed by the Battle of Northampton and the Battle of Wakefield. Each new bloody confrontation saw thousands of men smash into each other, each thrust with a dagger or a sword that hit home a blow to the heart of the House of Lancaster or York. The balance of power shifted fluidly from one house to the other, but sometimes into nothingness, with no real victor or controlling stake identifiable.

The Many Wars of the Roses

30 years of conflict mapped out on a bloody land

St Albans 22 May 1455
St Albans saw Richard of York lead a force of over 3,000 soldiers on a direct course for London to take down Henry VI. Henry rode out to meet the Yorkist army and took up a defensive position at St Albans. Richard attacked the city with a great fury and defeated Henry. Queen Margaret and her young son Edward were forced into exile.

Blore Heath 23 September 1459
Despite scoring a victory at St Albans, Richard's advance to London was halted. The Wars of the Roses rekindled themselves four years later when Richard, fearing his campaign was losing momentum, decided to centralise his forces around the town of Ludlow and launch a massive assault on the Lancastrians. Queen Margaret heard of the movement and dispatched her loyal Lord Audley to intercept. Despite Audley having roughly twice as many soldiers, he lost the battle and his life.

Wakefield 30 December 1460
With a large countering army assembled by the Lancastrians near the city of York, Richard took his forces north along with Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury to intercept. Richard took a defensive position at Sandal Castle due to Lancastrians sporting a force close to 20,000, while his own forces numbered only around 10,000. Despite taking Sandal however, Richard decided to ride out and meet the Lancastrian forces directly. He was eventually overwhelmed and killed in battle. Richard Neville and Richard's son are executed.

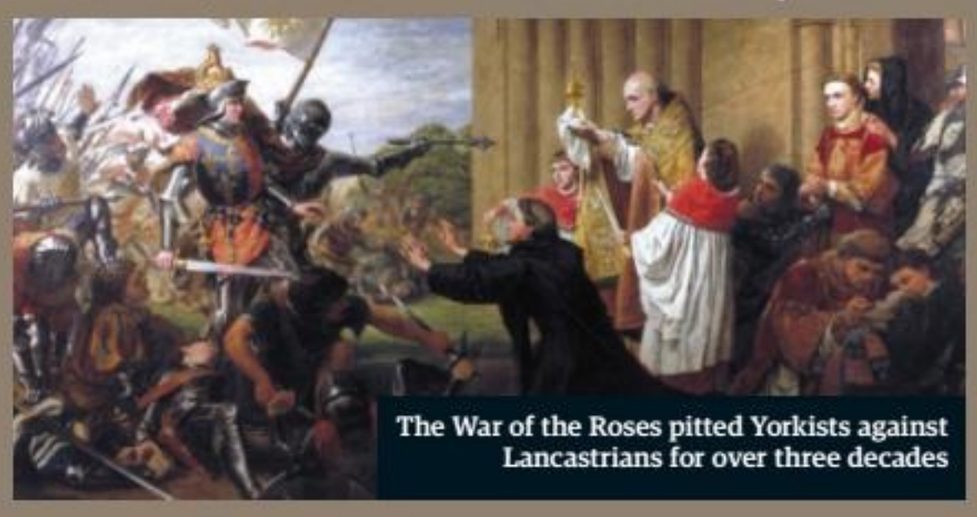
Towton 29 March 1461
A vast Yorkist force numbering 30,000 men fought the elements and a 35,000-strong force of Lancastrians at Towton. After hours of bloody fighting the Duke of Norfolk arrived with reinforcements at the last moment and the Yorkists won the day.

Edgecote Moor 26 July 1469
Eight years on from the bloody battle of Towton, in which Edward IV had ruled unopposed, an army sent to put down an uprising was attacked by Lancastrian forces and quickly defeated, with the Earls of Pembroke and Devon killed.

Tewkesbury 4 May 1471
The Lancastrian forces of the 4th Duke of Somerset, Edmund Beaufort, plotted a course for Wales. King Edward IV heard of the move and sent an army to intercept. The two sides met at Tewkesbury and, after Somerset attempted a failed break of the Yorkist lines and was countered, the Lancastrian force was routed, the Prince of Wales killed in battle, Somerset executed and Queen Margaret of Anjou captured.

Bosworth 22 August 1485
Richard III had succeeded Edward IV as king. Henry Tudor had other ideas and landed in Wales on 7 August 1485 to take the crown. Richard heard of the invasion and moved to intercept Henry, the two forces eventually meeting south of Bosworth. During the ensuing battle Lord Thomas Stanley and Sir William Stanley switched sides from the Yorkists to the Lancastrians. As a result, Richard III was killed and Henry became King Henry VII.

Stoke 16 June 1487
The last battle of the War of the Roses, Stoke was a final, wild roll of the dice for the remaining Yorkist forces. Bolstered by German and Irish mercenaries, Yorkist troops started to march toward London, but were met at East Stoke and obliterated. Its leaders were captured and imprisoned, its men killed and the last remnants of the Yorkist faction destroyed.

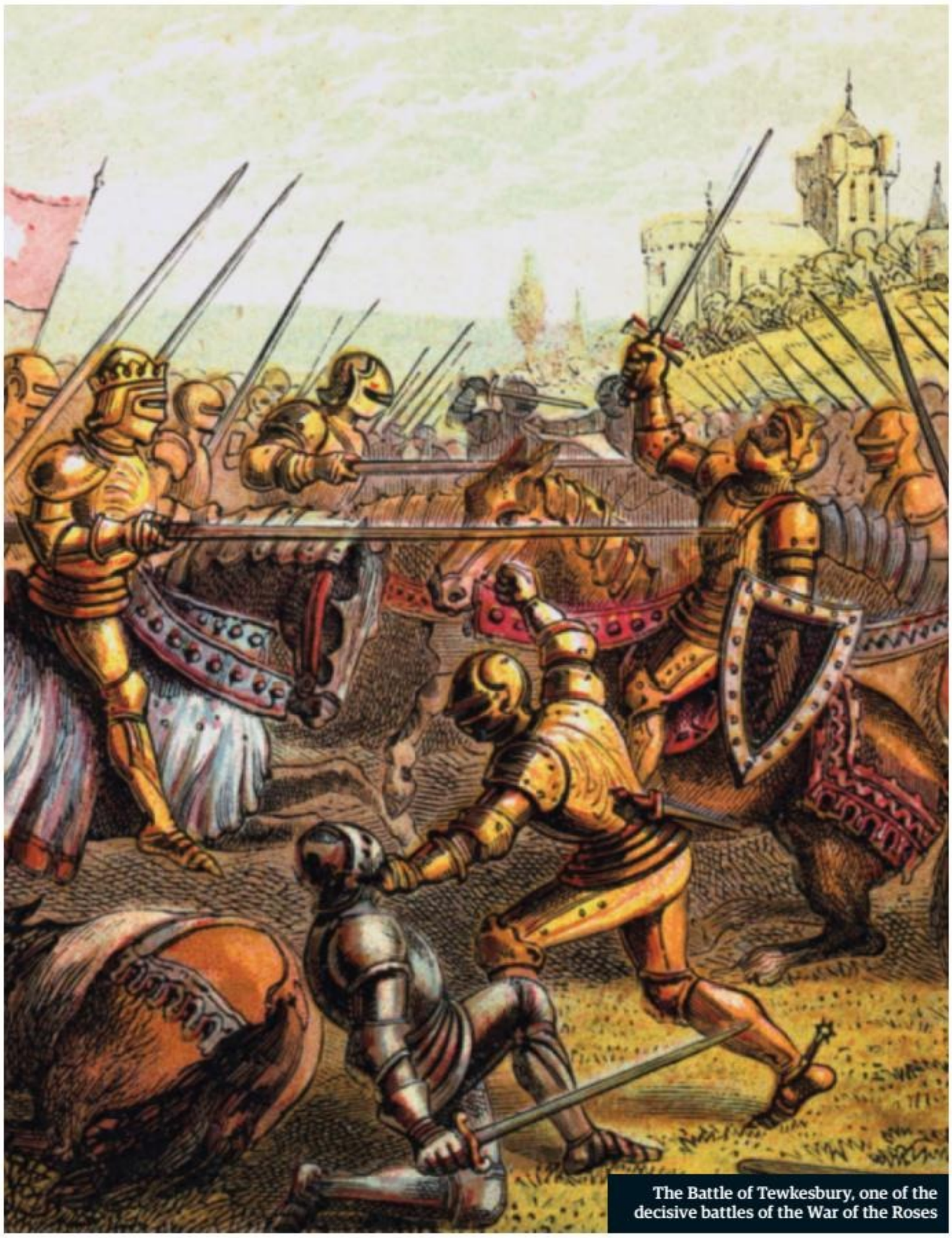

The War of the Roses pitted Yorkists against Lancastrians for over three decades

War of the Roses in Shakespeare and beyond

How has literature and film portrayed the events?

One of our main sources for information in popular culture on the War of the Roses is William Shakespeare's *Henry VI* trilogy, which charts the political machinations, fights and jealousies that tore the English political system apart in the mid-15th century. Indeed, the current name for the series of battles – War of the Roses – actually stems from Act 2, Scene 4 of the work, where the bickering lords are asked to show their allegiance to either Richard Duke of York or the rival Duke of Somerset by selecting either a red or white rose from a garden. This scene, despite its dubious historical accuracy – historians think it never took place – was later seized on Sir Walter Scott and popularised through his work *Anne of Geierstein*. The name, 'Wars of the Roses', therefore stuck and has proceeded to be used to describe the conflict since. Up until this point, the conflict had instead simply been referred to as the 'civil war'.

The historically apocryphal scene from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* where supporters of the Yorkists and Lancastrians pick either a red or white rose to show their allegiance



The Battle of Tewkesbury, one of the decisive battles of the War of the Roses

These battles didn't just see commoners cut down in their thousands; for Richard Plantagenet, the Duke of York, Wakefield would be his final resting place. Decades of warfare had finally caught up with him. With Richard slain in battle and his second son Edmund and ally Richard of Salisbury captured and executed, Wakefield was one of the largest Lancastrian victories of the War of the Roses and a boon for the ageing but powerful Margaret of Anjou. Following Wakefield, the House of Lancaster pressed on, with their army returning south, outmanoeuvring Warwick's Yorkist army and defeating them at the Second Battle of St Albans. By now, all seemed to be lost for the ambitious House of York.

With Richard Plantagenet dead and the Earl of Warwick having suffered a bad defeat, the House of York desperately needed a figurehead to rally around and so Richard's first son, Edward of March, stepped into the breach. He had already defeated Jasper Tudor's Lancastrian army at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross in Herefordshire and, hearing of Warwick's defeat, joined his father's ally. The two of them and their armies then made a beeline for the capital. Margaret and Henry VI were not in London, as they were travelling northward, so the Yorkists entered the city unopposed and to a rapturous welcome. The welcome was so enthusiastic because Henry VI's incompetence as king had seen popular opinion sway in Edward's favour and the common people had seemingly had enough of being under Lancastrian ruler.

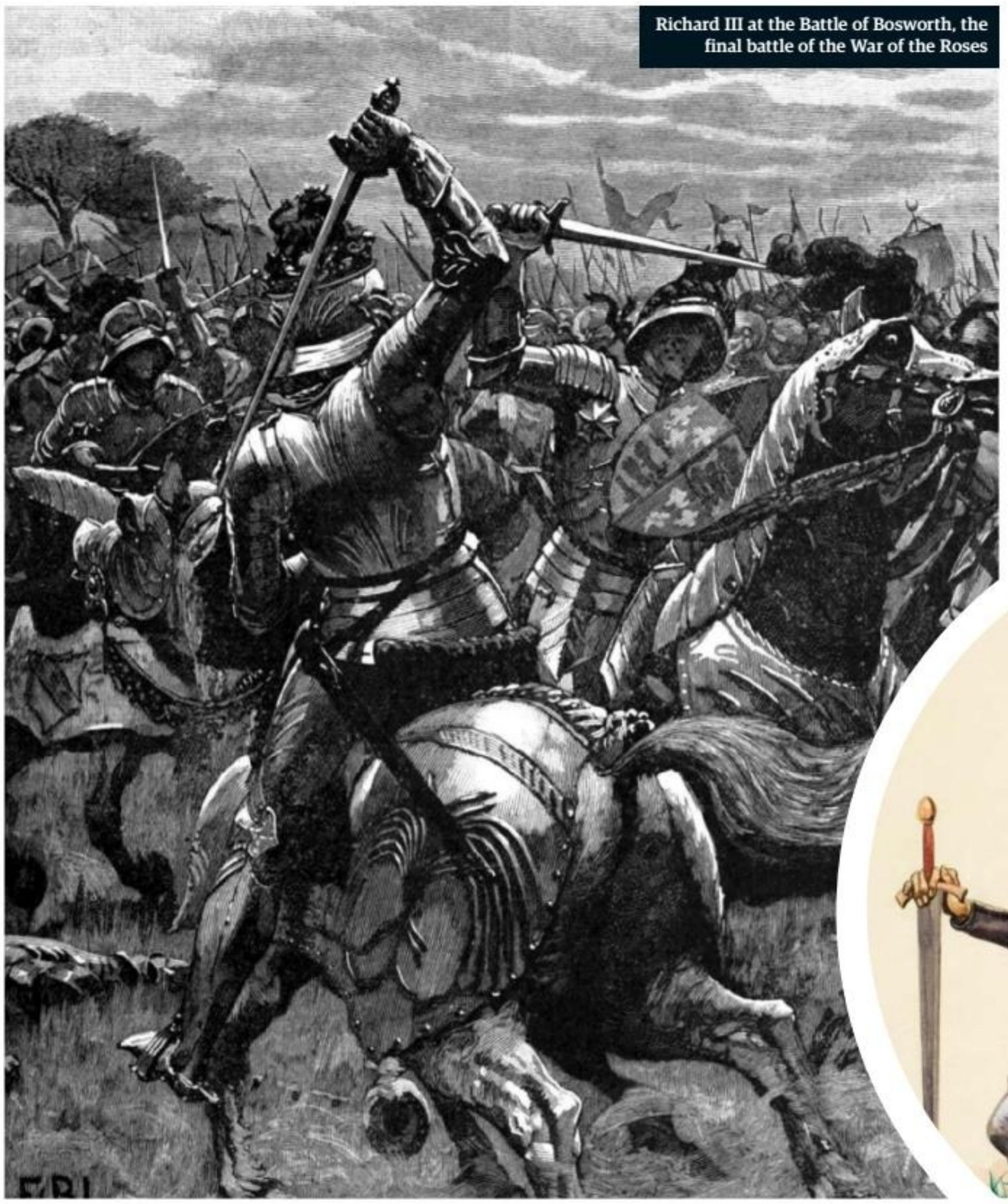
> "Importantly though, while Margaret and the House of Lancaster were down for the count, they were not down and out"

Such was the anti-Lancastrian mood that not only did Edward receive huge support from all the Yorkist nobles around the city but he was unofficially crowned king in an impromptu ceremony held at Westminster Abbey. Edward knew though that while he had enjoyed the ceremony, he would never truly be king until Henry

VI and Margaret of Anjou had been disposed of. Vowing to Parliament that he would not have a formal coronation until all pretenders to the throne had been crushed, he joined forces once more with his father's old ally, the 'Kingmaker', Warwick. Together they rode forth toward the north, leading a deadly army of over 30,000 men; their mission to take a proverbial hammer to the House of Lancaster and cut the head off its talisman.

This already large army grew even more along the way, with more men and nobles drawn to Edward's cause as he marched toward Henry VI and Margaret, as he headed straight toward what was to be one of the bloodiest and most decisive battles in the entirety of the War of the Roses. Edward and his army was finally met by the House of Lancaster's great military commander Henry Beaufort, third Duke of Somerset, south of York at the village of Towton. Margaret had dispatched Somerset to put down the son of her old nemesis Richard Plantagenet once and for all. Beaufort turned up to the killing fields of Towton with an army of 35,000 soldiers just as the first snow began to fall and settle on the ground.

When the screams and the drums of war had died away, but the blood still startlingly vivid against the white snow, England had a new king. The House of York had emerged triumphant and Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou had been forced to flee to Scotland. Edward was officially crowned the new king of England in June the same year and slowly, one by one, the remaining pockets of Lancastrian soldiers were hunted down, either killed or forced to leave England. Margaret orchestrated an attack on Carlisle later that year but due to lack of financial power and men at arms, her advance was repulsed by Edward's Yorkist forces. Her loyal Duke of Somerset was later defeated and executed at the Battle of Hexham and her husband, Henry VI was captured and imprisoned yet again. This time he was held at the notorious Tower of London.



Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth, the final battle of the War of the Roses

Bankrupt and no longer in command of any military support, Margaret had only one option left open to her – to return to France with her son. Setting sail from Scotland in mid-1465, Margaret of Anjou, once queen of England and leader of the House of Lancaster, was down for the count. Her position in England lay in ruin and her dream to see her son Edward of Lancaster crowned king was crushed. Importantly though, while Margaret and the House of Lancaster were down for the count, they were not down and out.

The following years of exile did nothing to dampen Margaret's ambitions as she would continue her plotting and scheming to take back the English throne like never before. In an audacious political move, she struck a deal with her former enemy, 'the Kingmaker' Earl of Warwick in an attempt to re-establish her previous control of England. While her husband Henry VI would lose his life in the Tower of London and Yorkist Edward IV would go on to be king along with his younger brother Richard III, by the time the fighting ceased in the climactic Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 and the curtain on the War of the Roses was finally brought down, it was the Henry Tudor who would win this sabahe game of thrones and take the crown as king of England.

The story of Henry Tudor's rise to the kingship of England, 20 years after Margaret's exile, and his subsequent founding of the historic Tudor dynasty is a story for another day. Tudor's meteoric elevation dominated the last years of the Wars of the Roses and his ultimate victory was far from a certainty, with history painting a tale more at home with the concepts of luck and chance rather than those of divine right and martial might. For that was, in the end, the real truism of England's War of the Roses - that all is fair in love and war and that blood is everything.

The crowing of Henry VII, who would establish the Tudor dynasty

The Ultimate Guide to England's Game of Thrones

Follow our comprehensive timeline of the key events that decided the outcome in the Wars of the Roses

Henry VI is born
The son of warrior king Henry V and Catherine de Valois, Henry VI was crowned king of both England and France during infancy. He would proceed to oversee England's final losses in the Hundred Years' War and famously married the strong and powerful Margaret of Anjou.
6 December 1421

The Kingmaker
Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick was one of the most powerful figures in the entire war, personally overseeing the deposition of two kings is born. He was killed at the Battle of Barnet.
22 November 1428

Margaret of Anjou is born
One of the key players in the Wars of the Roses, Margaret of Anjou, the future wife of King Henry VI, is born to René d'Anjou, Duke of Anjou and Isabel de Lorraine.
23 March 1430

Jasper Tudor is born
Son of legendary Welsh warrior Owen Tudor, who fought alongside Henry V at Agincourt, he would become a commander and play an important role in establishing Henry Tudor as king.
1431

Elizabeth of York is born
Elizabeth Woodville and Edward IV's only daughter to be born, Elizabeth of York would proceed to be queen consort of England under Henry VII. She is the Yorkist partner in the eventual joining of houses at the end of the Wars of the Roses.
11 February 1466

The Battle of Edgecote Moor
After raising an army to put down an uprising in Yorkshire, King Edward IV's forces are intercepted by a Lancastrian one and defeated by Robin of Redesdale.
26 July 1469

Battle of Losecote Field
Edward IV raises a new army and attacks Lancastrian troops at Empingham, winning well.
12 March 1470

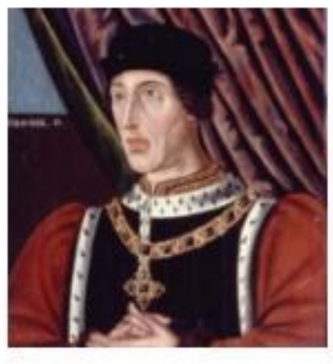
The end of Somerset
The final battle of the experienced Lancastrian commander, the Duke of Somerset, Hexham saw a large Yorkist victory and Somerset's capture and execution.
15 May 1464

Henry VI is restored to the throne
After been alienated and shunned by his old ally Edward IV, the Earl of Warwick strikes a deal with Margaret of Anjou to defeat the Yorkist king. 'The Kingmaker' restores Henry VI to the throne.
30 October 1470

The Kingmaker exits
The final curtain for 'the Kingmaker', Barnet sees Warwick die at the hand of Yorkist forces of Edward IV.
14 April 1471

Battle of Tewkesbury
Notable for the death of Margaret of Anjou's only son Edward and her own capture.
4 May 1471

Henry VI dies
After a period of incarceration in the Tower of London, it is reported that Henry VI has died. Edward VI is suspected to have ordered his death mere hours before he himself was re-crowned as king.
21 May 1471



Edward IV dies at 40
After over a decade of successful rule as the king of England in two spells, Edward IV dies suddenly and unexpectedly, throwing the country back into political turmoil. His heir, Edward V, is only 12 years old at the time of his father's death.
9 April 1483

Margaret of Anjou is finally defeated 1475
After spending most of her life caring for her son Edward in an attempt to ensure his succession to the throne of England, his death at the Battle of Tewkesbury is the final blow to the once-powerful queen. With her spirit broken she is exiled back to France, where she spends the remainder of her life living as a poor relation of the French king.

The Princes in the Tower die 1483
The only two sons alive at the time of their father's death Edward IV, Edward V of England and Richard of Shrewsbury are famously incarcerated in the Tower of London during their youth and then mysteriously disappear, likely killed to remove any possibility of them taking the throne at a future point. Who ordered the deaths is not known.

Henry VI and the War of the Roses

Future Yorkist king of England
Edward is the first son of Richard Plantagenet and Cicely Neville. Following his father's death at the Battle of Wakefield, Edward would famously go on to join forces with his father's old ally, the Earl of Warwick ('the Kingmaker') and take the crown for himself in bloody warfare. He marries the politically savvy Elizabeth Woodville.
28 April 1442

Margaret Beaufort is born
The future mother of King Henry VII is born at Bletsoe Castle, Bedfordshire, England. She would become the influential matriarch that sees the rise and establishment of the Tudor Dynasty.
31 May 1443

Richard marches on London
Disaffected with a list of grievances, Richard of York marches to London from Ireland, demanding Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset, to be removed from office due to perceived failures. He is not supported at court, however, and returns a year later empty-handed.
1452

The French defeat the English at Castillon
Following the disastrous Battle of Castillon, where French forces bring down the Hundred Years' War with a decisive victory over the English, Henry VI is told of the news and has his first mental breakdown.
17 July 1453

York is Lord Protector
After Henry VI's first mental breakdown, Richard of York returns to London and is named Lord Protector. York imprisons the Duke of Somerset in the Tower of London and forges his legendary warring relationship with Margaret of Anjou.
27 March 1453

Margaret takes back power
Following Henry VI's miraculous Christmas Day recovery from his madness, his wife Margaret of Anjou wastes no time in reinstating the king as the court's top power and pushes Richard out of the capital.
February 1455

First Battle of St Albans
The opening battle of the Wars of the Roses. St Albans is a small and scrappy battle but still leads to the death of three Lancastrian nobles.
22 May 1455

Warwick becomes captain of Calais
Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, becomes the captain of Calais, a powerful financial and military position that leads him into his apex of power, heavily controlling the affairs not just of England but of parts of France too.
1455

Hostilities resume
After years of strained peace, hostilities break out again, with Richard Neville scoring a victory against a numerically superior foe.
23 September 1459

The Battle of Ludford Bridge
Following a victory at Blore Heath Yorkist supporters regroup at Ludford. However, a large army led by Henry VI arrives and many of the Yorkists flee.
12 October 1459

House of York gain the upper hand
An interesting battle due to the Lancastrian Lord Edmund Grey switching side to the Yorkists mid-battle. The Yorkists won easily and gained the upper hand in the Wars.
10 July 1460

Act of Accord signed
As a compromise, it is agreed that Richard of York is the rightful successor to the throne after Henry VI. This deal excludes Henry's son, Edward of Lancaster, from the throne, angering Margaret of Anjou.
October 1460

Battle of Wakefield
The last battle for Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York. Riding out from a defensive position at Sandal Castle, Richard is killed by Lancastrian forces.
30 December 1460

Lancastrian army routed
Following his father's defeat at Wakefield, Richard's son Edward routs a Lancastrian army under the leadership of Jasper Tudor.
2 February 1461

Second Battle of St. Albans
The follow-up battle to the one that kickstarted the Wars of the Roses, this time there are more men, more deaths and, importantly, a Lancastrian victory.
17 February 1461

Battle of Ferrybridge
A small, precursory skirmish before the decisive and bloody Battle of Towton, Ferrybridge sees the Yorkist leader Lord Fitzwalter killed in action.
28 March 1461

The bloodiest battle
The most brutal battle of the Wars of the Roses, this clash sees almost 30,000 men die in driving snow near the village of Towton, Yorkshire.
29 March 1461

Edward's popular coronation
After clearing a path to the throne with a hard-fought victory at the Battle of Towton, Edward of York is crowned king in an official coronation in London. The coronation is well received by the public.
28 June 1461

Battle of Hedgeley Moor
The brother of 'the Kingmaker' Warwick, John Neville, clashes with a Lancastrian force on his way to the border of Scotland to arrange a peace treaty.
25 April 1464

Elizabeth Woodville marries King Edward IV
Coming from a low-ranking family, Woodville is called 'the most beautiful woman in the Island of Britain' and she uses this trait to marry advantageously, walking down the isle with King Edward IV.
1 May 1464

The king's mother arrives at courts
Following her son Henry's victory at the Battle of Bosworth Field, Henry's mother Margaret Beaufort arrives at court and creates a new title for herself; 'My Lady the King's Mother', ensuring herself legal and social independence..
1485

Henry unites the Houses
18 January 1486
In his marriage to Elizabeth of York, the only daughter of Elizabeth Woodville, Henry VII finally unites the remnants of the two warring Houses of York and Lancaster. The product of this marriage marks the beginning of the House of Tudor and the Tudor Dynasty, which would go on to rule England until 24 March 1603.

Buckingham revolts
Richard's ascension is immensely contentious and uprisings take place. One of the largest is a rebellion orchestrated by Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, who is especially disaffected. His rebellion fails, however.
18 October 1483

Richard becomes king
Despite simply being named as Lord Protector by Edward IV, Richard III is crowned king after the infamous affair of the princes in the Tower.
6 July 1483

Anne Neville dies
The wife of embattled king Richard III dies of what is now believed to be tuberculosis, at Westminster, London. There is an eclipse on the same day, which people see as an omen depicting the impending fall of Richard.
16 March 1485

Battle of Bosworth 22 August 1485
The decisive and climactic battle of the War of the Roses. The Battle of Bosworth sees the Yorkist king Richard III killed in combat, his 10,000-strong force routed and his enemy, the young and charismatic Henry Tudor, carve a direct path to the throne of England. He would be crowned King Henry VII months later.

The War of the Roses end 16 June 1487
Finally, after more than 30 years of turmoil, chaos, warfare, infighting, backstabbing, side-changing, murdering, scheming and plotting, the War of the Roses end with Henry Tudor quashing the last remaining threat to his throne at the Battle of Stoke. Henry proceeds to rule successfully for over 20 years, despite a couple of minor threats to his throne.

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1491 – 1547

Henry VIII the Warlord

In pursuing dreams of victory in France, Henry threw England into decades of war and the chaos of a Europe in conflict

Henry VIII was born dreaming of war. When he took the throne in April 1509, with his bride Catherine of Aragon at his side, Henry knew exactly what kind of king he wanted to be. His would be a glorious reign that would restore England to the magnificence it deserved. His father, Henry VII, had become unpopular by levying punishing taxes to restore the country's finances, but the new king had no intention of focusing on matters as petty as the treasury. He would be a conqueror.

By the end of his life, Henry was a bloated and frustrated mockery of the athletic youth that he had once been. He had grown up jousting, riding and hunting, and would often participate in chivalry tournaments in disguise. He had grown up hearing the stories of the great Henry V – the hero of Agincourt – and had dreamed of the battles that years of peace had deprived him of. He was determined that he would repeat his ancestor's triumphs in France and expand England's territory beyond Calais – perhaps even as far as Paris. He wholly believed that France belonged to him and

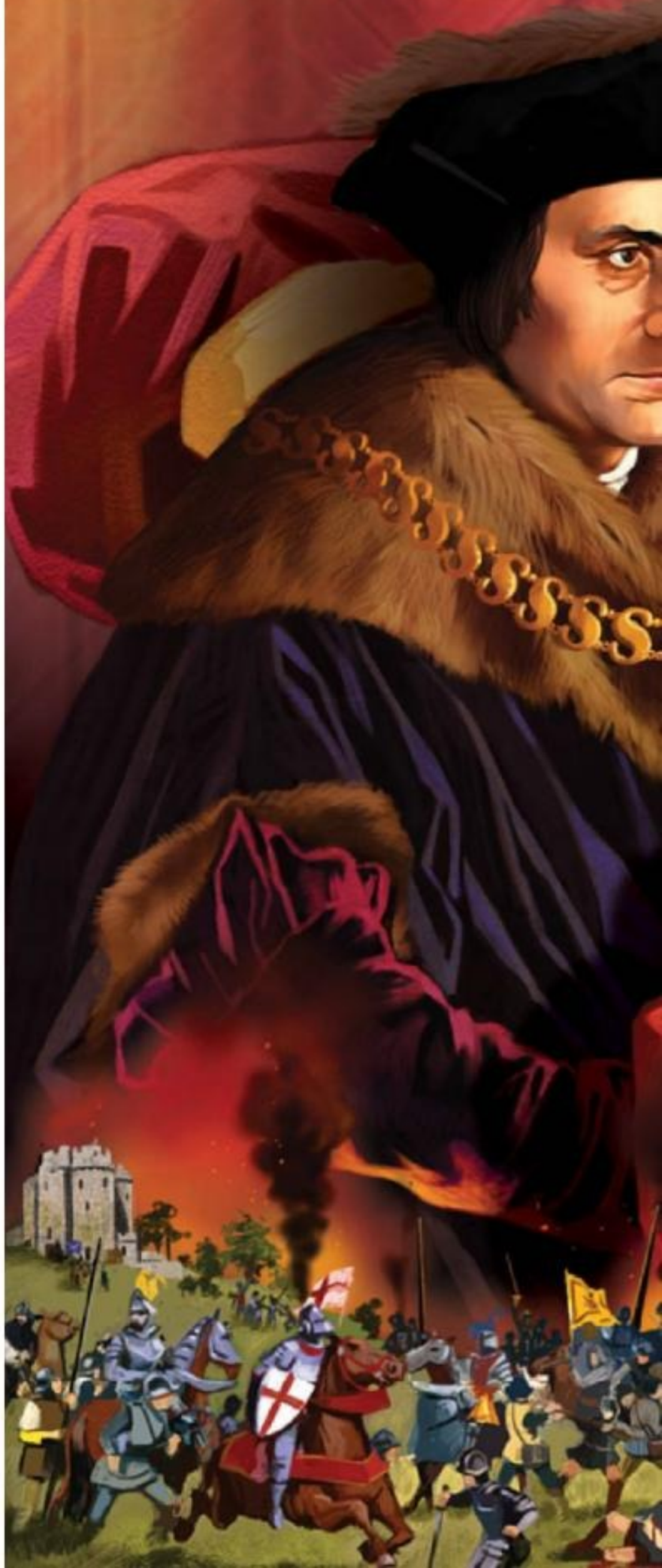
"By the end of his life, Henry was a bloated and frustrated mockery of the athletic youth that he had once been"

HENRY VIII

English, 1491-1547

Brief Bio

As king, Henry spent lavishly, courted conflict and pursued his own leisurely interests. His most enduring legacy is that, to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Henry separated England from the Catholic church. However, he is still better known for his six wives and how he rid himself of five.



– fortunately for the English monarch – he did not have to wait long to stake his claim.

Henry had grown up in years of stultifying peace thanks to his father's treaties with France and Aragon in Spain. Meanwhile, just across the Channel, the continent was in the throes of war. The powers of Europe clashed over the possession of Naples, essentially turning Italy into one big battleground. A quarrel over the region of Romagna had set Venice against the Vatican, and so Pope Julius II rallied France, the Holy Roman Empire and Spain (under Ferdinand II) in the final weeks of 1508, planning to split the Venetian territories among them.

Venice fell, but Julius feared French occupation of Italy. He mounted an impulsive attack on his allies which backfired as French forces stormed south in retaliation. A terrified Julius formed the Holy League, and Spain and the Holy Roman Empire sided with the papacy in 1511.

Henry VIII had now been on the throne for two years with his queen Catherine of Aragon (Ferdinand's daughter) at his side. A strong royal family was vital to his dream of a glorious England and he announced that he would marry her shortly after his father died. Catherine was fiercely loyal and determined to meet her king's expectations. She became pregnant almost immediately but their child was stillborn. It was a matter of weeks until Catherine was with child again, and she gave birth to a son, Henry, on New Year's Day, 1511. Sadly, Henry would survive for just seven weeks.

At this point, Henry was a young king just beginning his reign. He was the head of a proud royal family and he had shown his subjects that he

"Wolsey was the perfect right-hand man, able to counterbalance the king's violent rages with his own skilled diplomacy"

was not the penny-pinching tyrant that his father was. The Holy League would enable him to serve his God and show France the power of England's might. The full force of that might would be delivered by Henry's expanding Royal Navy, which would boast the world's largest and most advanced warships. It is important not to underestimate the importance of the pope's blessing. He was still a devout Catholic and would go on to condemn the Protestant Martin Luther so harshly that the pope would give him the title 'Defender of the Faith'. His religion also included the concept of Divine Right; France was his God-given property. The Holy League should have been undefeatable.

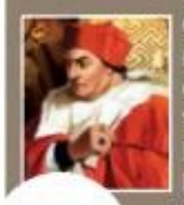
However, the first attack ended in disaster. An English force sailed to Gascony in June 1512, due to meet up with Ferdinand's army and claim the region of Aquitaine for Henry. Unfortunately, Ferdinand decided that he was more interested in claiming Navarre for himself and directed his troops in that direction. Ill-equipped and ravaged by dysentery, the English troops were forced to retreat. Henry was furious but resolute.

Less than a year later, a second invasion plan was underway, with much of the organisation left in the hands of the invaluable Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. Wolsey was the perfect right-hand man for a king like Henry, able to counterbalance the king's violent rages with his own skilled diplomacy while sharing a similarly rabid ambition. Wolsey was a fixer; he made sure that whatever Henry wanted, Henry got. What Henry wanted was France, and so, in April 1513, an army was raised and an attack was made on Brest.

This incursion proved even more disastrous than the attempt on Aquitaine, but Henry would not be dissuaded and personally accompanied the English landing at Calais in June. With his feet on French soil and standing at the

THOMAS WOLSEY

English, circa 1475-1530



Brief Bio

Cardinal Wolsey rose to power due to his ability to ensure that Henry got what he wanted. He was deeply ambitious and a skilled political operator. He became archbishop of York, and was made a cardinal and lord chancellor in 1515. He was instrumental in the peace process following Henry's first war in France, and often took public blame for Henry's mistakes. Wolsey's ambitions of becoming pope would be scuppered when Henry's determination to split from Catherine of Aragon destroyed England's relationship with Rome. Scrabbling to reconcile his position in Rome with his duty to his king, Wolsey's failure to deliver papal approval would prove to be his downfall.

Debacle at Gascony

June 1512

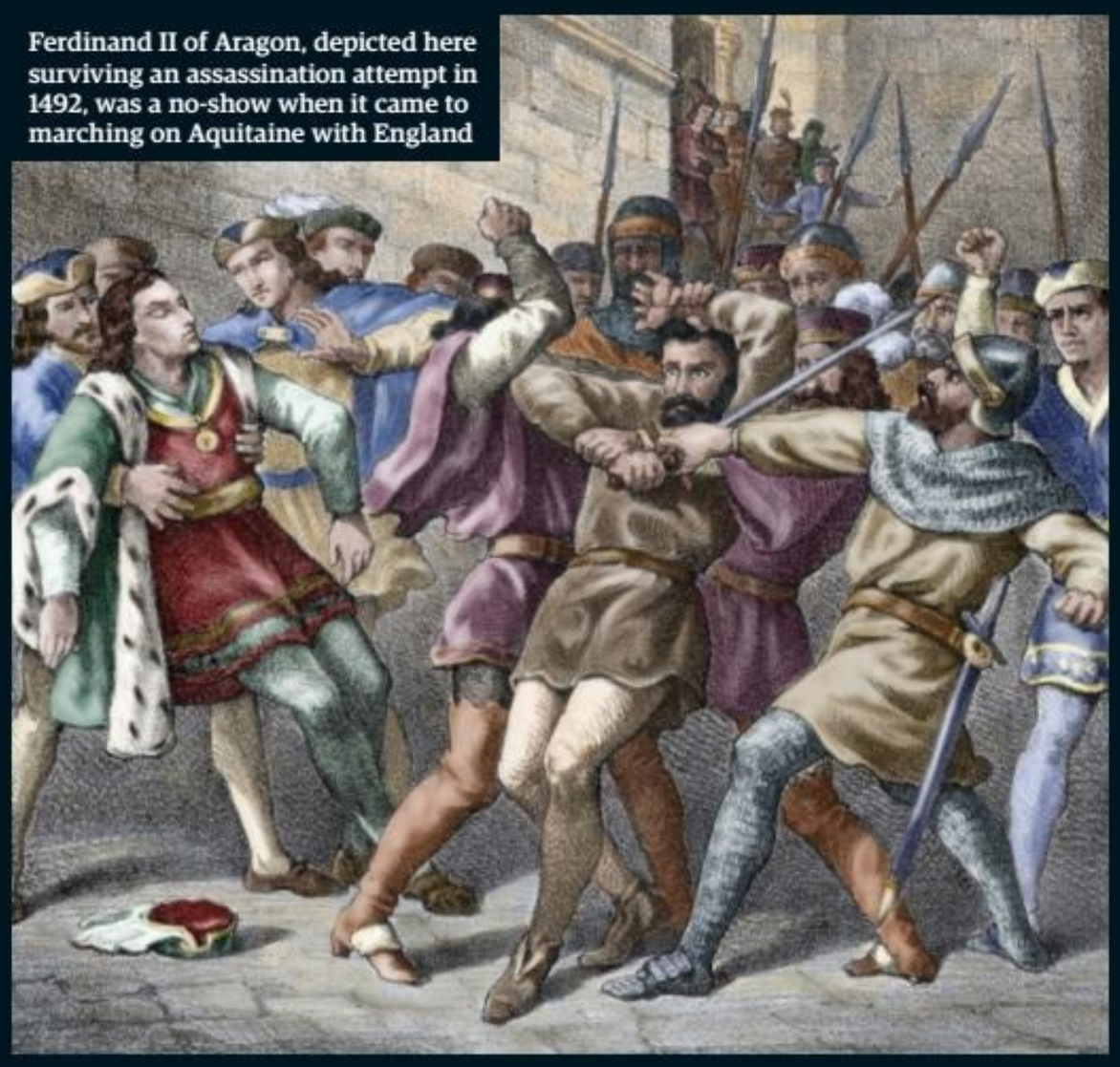
Henry's only concern prior to the expedition to Gascony was that he couldn't be there. It was the first attack on France during his reign and it should have been the first step in a glorious campaign. Henry was all too eager to ally himself with his father-in-law, Ferdinand II, who had similar ambitions to claim French territory. Both kings had joined the Holy League, which had been created in response to France's military activity in Italy. The League had decided that Ferdinand and Henry should attack together and it should have been an impressive display of force.

The Marquis of Dorset was given control of the English forces and the invaders were due to march with Ferdinand on Aquitaine. However, once the Marquis set foot on dry land, he discovered that the Spanish king had not kept his word. Instead, Ferdinand was occupied with his own attack on Navarre, which better served the Spanish king's own interests. The Marquis's troops quarrelled with the few Spanish forces that they had been given and many of his men succumbed to dysentery. As a result of all this, he had no choice but to retreat.

Although Henry can't be blamed for the failure of this attack, it shows the Holy League for what it really was. The kings were fighting with the pope's blessing and the glory of God, but they were all out for themselves. Once the fighting started, each monarch was really only interested in what land they could claim – their allies only functioned as a bank and backup.

Verdict

The forced retreat enraged Henry, pushing him towards leading his own attack, and also sowed the seeds of distrust that would come more prominently to the fore throughout his further campaigns



Ferdinand II of Aragon, depicted here surviving an assassination attempt in 1492, was a no-show when it came to marching on Aquitaine with England

Victory at Flodden Field

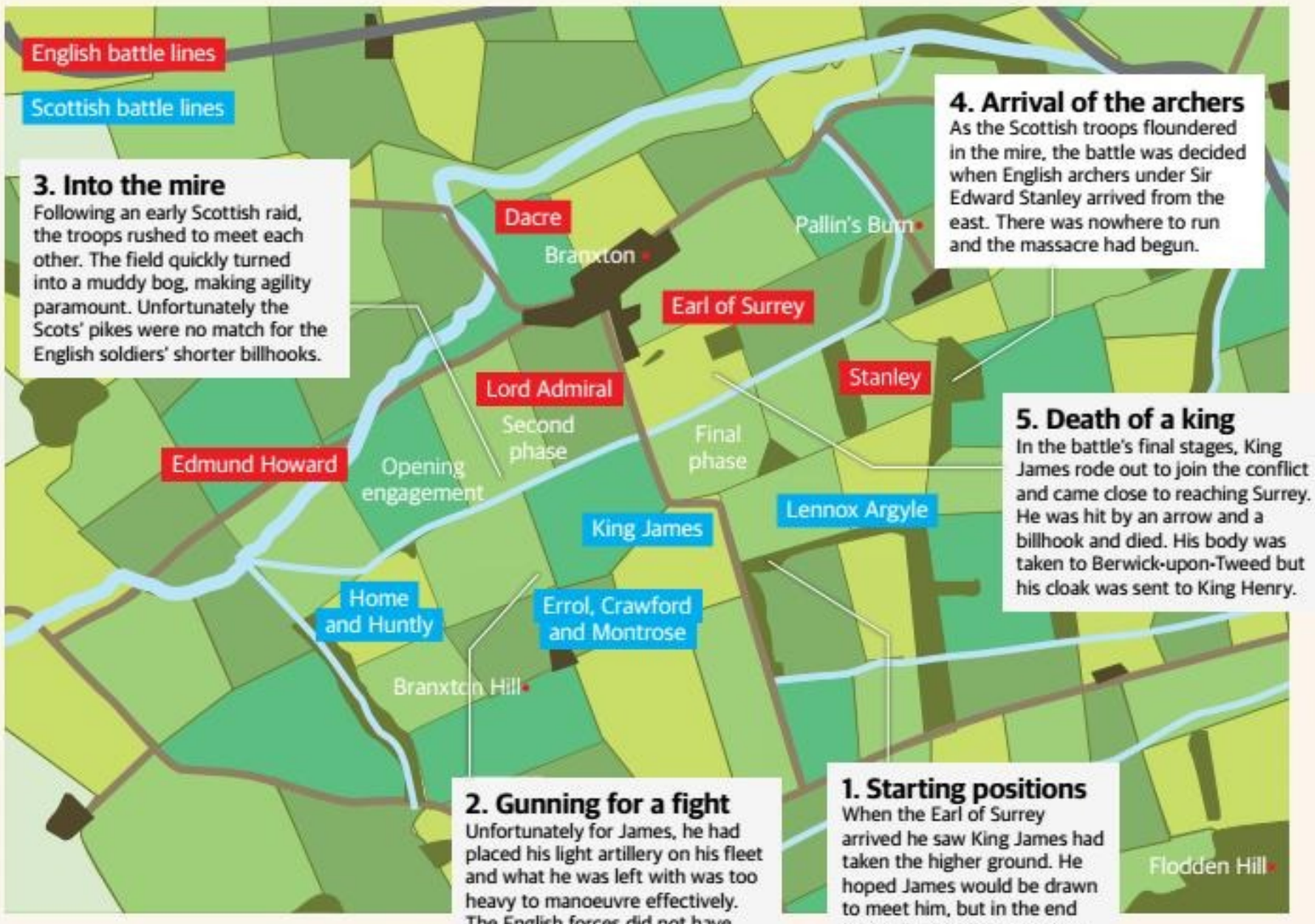
9 September 1513

With the king's attention focused on France, the timing was ripe for an attack from the north. King Louis XII reached out to his ally in Scotland and James IV was very agreeable. He wrote to Henry instructing him to abandon his war on the French – an instruction that Henry roundly ignored. The Scottish troops rallied and marched south to the border, sending word that they intended to invade. Having appeased their sense of honour, they waited for the English troops at Flodden.

Catherine of Aragon was acting as regent while her husband was at war in France. Catherine was a woman who believed fiercely in duty, honour and loyalty, and the prospect of losing a battle in her husband's absence was too awful to even consider.

Together with the Earl of Surrey, Catherine raised an army from the Midlands to meet the Scottish invaders. Surrey met the Scottish army at Flodden Field and subjected them to a crushing defeat. The number of Scottish dead numbered in the thousands, and King James IV himself was among the fatalities.

While Henry's refusal to leave France may have been the final straw that prompted the attack, he had very little to do with the result of the battle – it was the Earl of Surrey who won the day. The Scottish king fell on the battlefield, and his cloak was sent to France as a trophy for Henry. A decisive victory, but not one which can be attributed to any military excellence on Henry's part.


English battle lines
Scottish battle lines
3. Into the mire
Following an early Scottish raid, the troops rushed to meet each other. The field quickly turned into a muddy bog, making agility paramount. Unfortunately the Scots' pikes were no match for the English soldiers' shorter billhooks.
Dacre
Branxton
Pallin's Burn
4. Arrival of the archers
As the Scottish troops floundered in the mire, the battle was decided when English archers under Sir Edward Stanley arrived from the east. There was nowhere to run and the massacre had begun.
Earl of Surrey
Stanley
Lord Admiral
Second phase
Final phase
5. Death of a king
In the battle's final stages, King James rode out to join the conflict and came close to reaching Surrey. He was hit by an arrow and a billhook and died. His body was taken to Berwick-upon-Tweed but his cloak was sent to King Henry.
Edmund Howard
Opening engagement
Lennox Argyle
King James
Home and Huntly
Errol, Crawford and Montrose
Branxton Hill
2. Gunning for a fight
Unfortunately for James, he had placed his light artillery on his fleet and what he was left with was too heavy to manoeuvre effectively. The English forces did not have this problem and promptly started their bombardment.
1. Starting positions
When the Earl of Surrey arrived he saw King James had taken the higher ground. He hoped James would be drawn to meet him, but in the end Surrey flanked from the east and arrived from the north.
Flodden Hill

Verdict

While the victory would assure Henry of England's military might, it was the start of a long and costly struggle with the Scots that would distract him from his goals in France.

"The Scottish king fell on the battlefield, and his cloak was sent to France as a trophy for Henry"

The Scottish army outnumbered the English by about 15,000 at Flodden, but some clever tactics won out

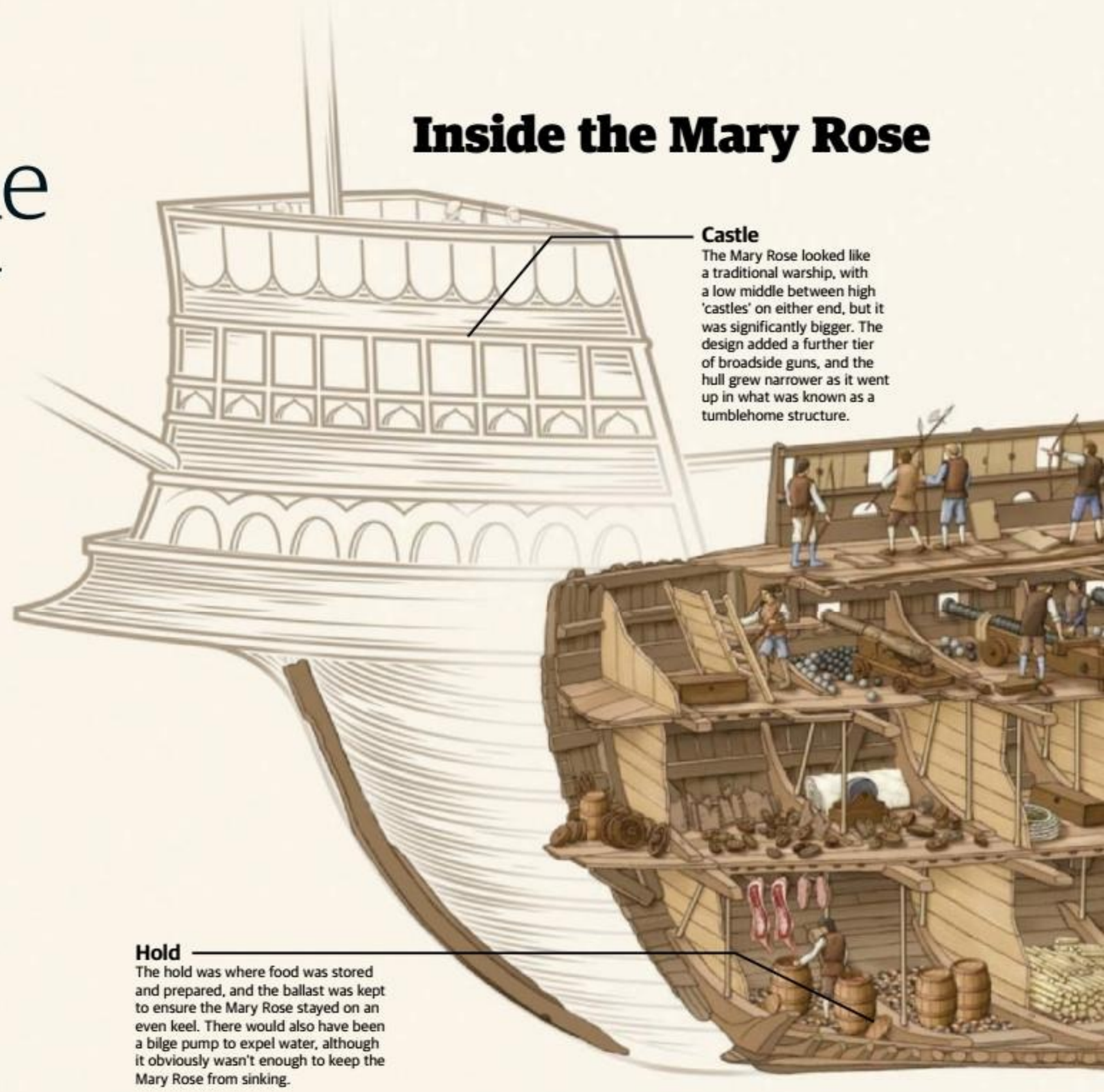
Father of the Royal Navy

Henry might be known as the founder of the Royal Navy but its creation had begun during the reign of Henry VII. Five royal warships had been built by the time Henry VIII took the throne, but the young king wanted more from his military might.

Henry knew that Scotland had invested in their own navy and that he was potentially facing a two-pronged attack by sea. Henry ordered the construction of two great warships: the infamous Mary Rose (which embarrassingly and mysteriously sank while leading the defence against the French at the Solent) and the Peter Pomegranate. Henry's ambition knew no limits and the English Navy would be the biggest, the most advanced and the most fearsome. He equipped his ships with the latest guns and the heaviest cannons, while employing new innovations like hinged gun ports. By the end of Henry's reign, his fleet numbered 58.

Enormous gunships aside, perhaps the most important innovations Henry made to the navy were on land. He created the first naval dock in Portsmouth, he gave the Grant of the Royal Charter to Trinity House (which developed beacons, buoys and lighthouses), and he created the Navy Board and the Office of Admiralty. Henry is known as the father of the Royal Navy because he didn't just bulk up its muscle, he created its backbone.

Inside the Mary Rose



Castle
The Mary Rose looked like a traditional warship, with a low middle between high 'castles' on either end, but it was significantly bigger. The design added a further tier of broadside guns, and the hull grew narrower as it went up in what was known as a tumblehome structure.

Hold
The hold was where food was stored and prepared, and the ballast was kept to ensure the Mary Rose stayed on an even keel. There would also have been a bilge pump to expel water, although it obviously wasn't enough to keep the Mary Rose from sinking.

head of an English army, Henry was exhilarated. He made straight for the town of Thérouanne and promptly laid siege to it. The Holy Roman Emperor and fellow Holy League leader, Maximilian, joined him soon afterwards, helping to assure Henry that he was on the side of the angels. Finally, Henry tasted glory on 16 August 1513 when the French attacked in the Battle of the Spurs. The light French cavalry were unable to withstand the combined forces of the invaders and fled. Henry claimed the day as a great victory, which was consolidated when Thérouanne surrendered on 22 August. The subsequent capture of Tournai was just as important to Henry, and he kept that town as an English stronghold while giving Thérouanne to Maximilian as a gesture of their allegiance.

What had Henry actually achieved? He'd taken two towns from the French, but Paris was a long way away. Nothing he'd done would tip the scales in either direction, but this was just the beginning. Henry was in his element. He was re-enacting the glories of Henry V and who knew how far he could go? Even as Henry celebrated his victories in France, trouble at home soon threatened to bring everything to a halt. All too aware of the English forces currently on their soil, the French reached out to King James IV of Scotland and suggested that this might be the perfect opportunity to mount an attack of their own. James marched south to Flodden Ridge with his armies to await the English.

While England may have seemed weak, Queen Catherine, acting as regent, had no intention of allowing such a challenge to go unanswered. An army was raised and met the Scots on 9 September. The English victory was brutally decisive and King James was killed. The gleeful queen sent the fallen monarch's bloody cloak to her husband in France, with the message: "In this your Grace shall see how I keep my promise, sending you for your banners a king's coat." Henry was conquering his enemies abroad, while his queen was seeing off attackers at home.

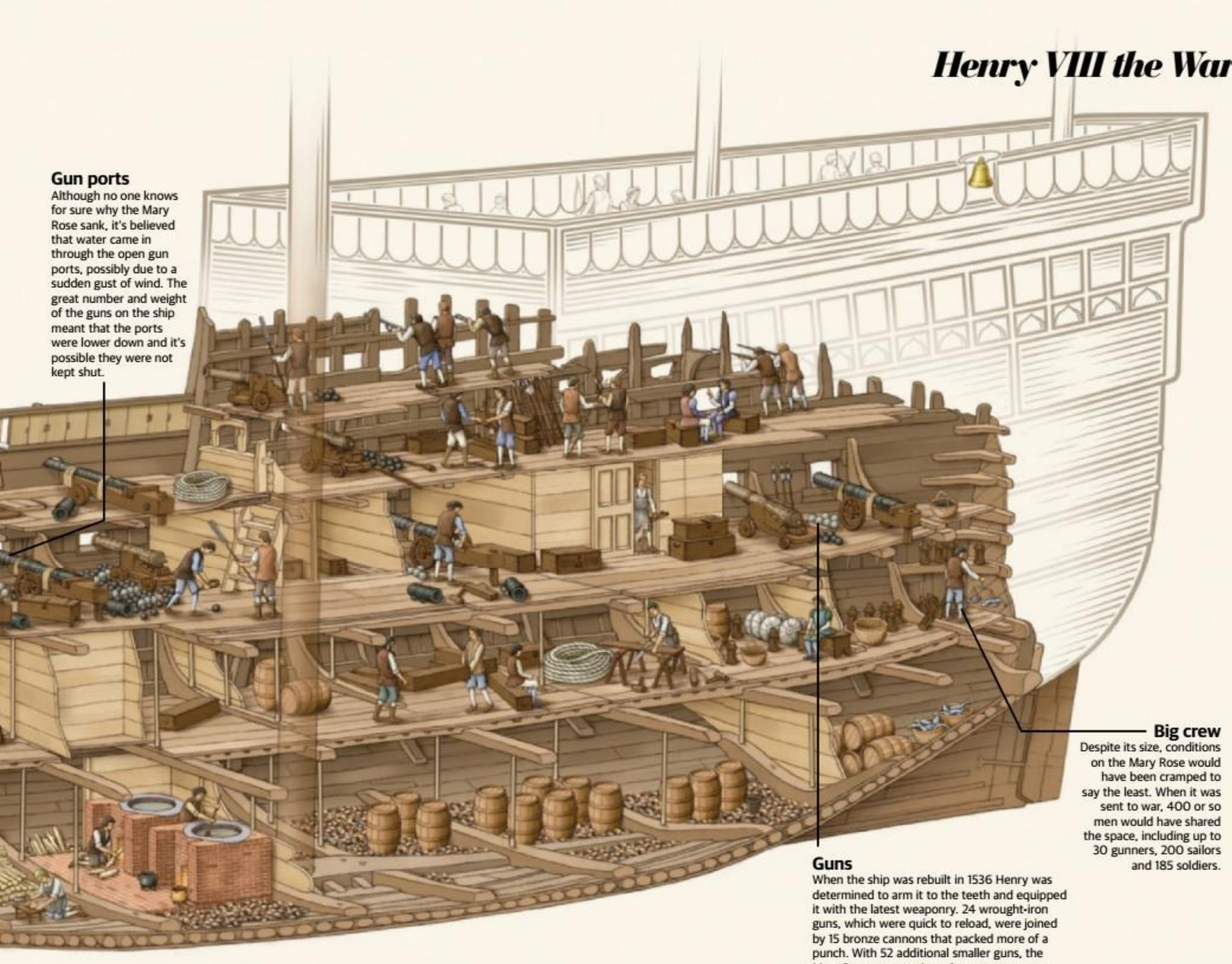
Sadly for the warrior king, peace was just around the corner, whether Henry wanted it or not. He had been acting as a war chest to his allies and England's coffers were so depleted that there was simply no way that he could carry on alone. He would have to make peace. The next few years presented Henry with a new potential ally, and a new enemy. The ambitious Francis I took the French crown, while the Austrian King Charles V was elected Holy Roman Emperor (adding Spain and a huge portion of Italy to his kingdom). Wolsey, aware of the financial sinkhole that the wars had been, worked hard to keep the peace. He managed to put quills to paper with the Treaty of London in 1518, while friendship would be forged at the Field of the Cloth of Gold on 7 June 1520. The plan was that Henry and Francis would spend a week enjoying the festivities and settling their differences, while Wolsey met with Charles V. It did not go according to plan.

For all Wolsey's good intentions, this attempt at friendship was doomed from the start. Henry had never wanted peace to start with,

THOMAS MORE
English, 1478-1535

Brief Bio

Thomas More trained as a lawyer and nearly became a monk before entering Henry's employ in 1517, taking on a variety of roles from interpreter to writer and chief diplomat. The two quickly became close confidants and More was knighted four years later, before becoming the speaker of the House of Commons in 1523. It was his strong Catholic faith that would prove his downfall. Although he was made lord chancellor in 1529, he rejected the formation of the Church of England with Henry at its head, so resigned soon after. His refusal to accept the new denomination would lead to his arrest and eventual execution on 6 July 1535.


Gun ports
Although no one knows for sure why the Mary Rose sank, it's believed that water came in through the open gun ports, possibly due to a sudden gust of wind. The great number and weight of the guns on the ship meant that the ports were lower down and it's possible they were not kept shut.
Big crew
Despite its size, conditions on the Mary Rose would have been cramped to say the least. When it was sent to war, 400 or so men would have shared the space, including up to 30 gunners, 200 sailors and 185 soldiers.
Guns
When the ship was rebuilt in 1536 Henry was determined to arm it to the teeth and equipped it with the latest weaponry. 24 wrought-iron guns, which were quick to reload, were joined by 15 bronze cannons that packed more of a punch. With 52 additional smaller guns, the Mary Rose was a serious threat.

© Courtesy of the Mary Rose Trust

and Francis had no intention of bowing down to his English counterpart. Ambitious, stubborn and proud, the two men were too similar for any attempts at friendship to work. After the first meeting was concluded, the two kings engaged in a week of oneupmanship and competition. It was a week dedicated to flaunting power and status; the 'cloth of gold' referred to the ludicrously lavish tents. Henry was determined to prove his athleticism and joined the competitions, but Francis had a similar idea. Henry had to suffer the humiliation of losing to the French king in a wrestling match, and it is hardly surprising that the only result of the meeting was a greater sense of hatred. Instead, Henry turned his diplomatic attentions to Charles V.

Henry's alliance with the Habsburgs had continued throughout the years of peace, despite one or two hiccups involving marriage arrangements. Crucially, Charles and Henry shared a mutual loathing of Martin Luther and King Francis. His hatred of the French king meant that war was inevitable and Henry eagerly awaited the perfect opportunity to mount another attack. When hostilities resumed in 1521, Henry declared that England was now allied with the Holy Roman Emperor and signed the Treaty of Windsor in 1522 to make 'The Great Enterprise' official. At this point in his plans, Henry could not afford a full-scale invasion and an attack on Picardy failed due to a lack of communication and, perhaps more importantly, trust.

"Henry's ambition to conquer France was hamstrung by the fact that he couldn't afford it"

Henry's ambition to conquer France and claim the throne for himself was hamstrung by the fact that he couldn't afford it. He had previously helped to bankroll Ferdinand and Maximilian and he had seen them make peace without him. Henry was scared that Charles might repeat his father's trick and, for his part, Charles had no particular interest in seeing Henry on the French throne. Their mutual distrust would only grow.

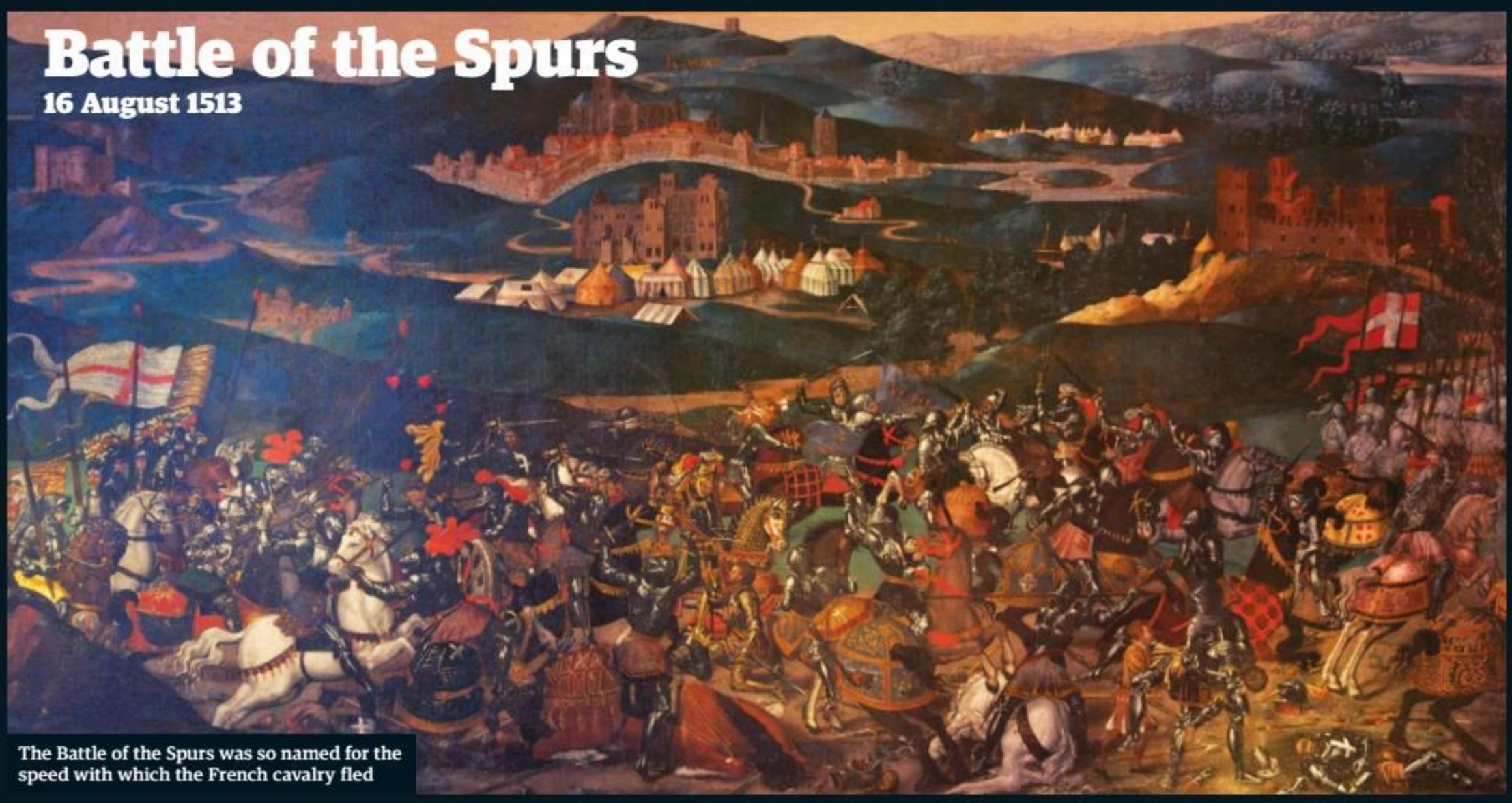
Trust wasn't the only problem. In an echo of 1513, Henry was distracted by the constant threat from the north. Whenever he began a campaign in France, the Scottish forces would threaten attack, forcing him to wage a war on two fronts. Henry was enraged and infuriated but he would not give up. He mounted another attack in 1523 to support the rebelling Duke of Bourbon, but Charles sent no help and the English troops were forced to retreat.

The line was finally crossed when Charles captured Francis at the Battle of Pavia in 1525 and showed no interest in sharing his spoils with the English king. Henry decided that the time had come for a full-scale invasion. With nowhere near enough money, Henry and Cardinal Wolsey tried to create the 'Amicable Grant' tax to pay for the attack, but opposition proved so fierce that Henry was forced to scrap his plans and publicly blame Wolsey. The humiliation of backpedalling helped Henry to realise that he was not going to get what he wanted. He signed the Treaty of the More with Francis's mother, Louise of Savoy, and turned his attention towards his family.

Not surprisingly, Charles's rejection rankled Henry. The Holy Roman Emperor's increased presence in Italy once again caused the panicking Pope Clement VII to create the League of Cognac,

Battle of the Spurs

16 August 1513



The Battle of the Spurs was so named for the speed with which the French cavalry fled

Henry and his English forces had been laying siege to the town of Thérouanne since July 1513. Following the embarrassment at Gascony, he had finally arrived in France to lead his army to great conquest. He camped close, but not too close to the city, and laid siege. A stalemate ensued until French action on 16 August tipped the scales.

The French forces had seen Maximilian's Holy Roman Army join Henry's and decided that the time had come to attempt a counterattack. On the morning of 16 August, French light cavalry, a few thousand strong, attacked the invaders' positions. However, word had reached the Holy League's camp of the planned attack and a trap had been prepared, leading to a brutal skirmish. It was an attack that was ultimately doomed to fail, with Henry and Maximilian's combined forces coming to roughly 30,000 men. The speed with which the surviving French rode away led to the name of the battle.

It was not a significant military victory in any other term than morale. Henry had been looking for a victory to claim in France, and this encounter was the first real battle of his campaign. He celebrated it but the actual gains from the Battle of the Spurs and the subsequent fall of Thérouanne would impress nothing but his ego. At great financial expense, Henry's dreams of Agincourt came a little closer.

Verdict

The victory at the Battle of the Spurs did more for Henry's ego than it did for the outcome of his campaign, essentially proving to be an incredibly expensive display.

which united Venice, Florence and France against Charles. Henry was not a member, but offered to help bankroll the group. His treaty with Francis in the Treaty of Westminster on 30 April 1527 was a sign that his mind was elsewhere.

Henry was desperate to be separated from Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn. He had no interest in a divorce and instead wanted to prove that it had been illegal to marry his brother's widow. This would soothe the good Catholic in him, but it set him against Charles V, who was appalled by what the accusation said about his aunt, Catherine. However, circumstances were not in Henry's favour; Charles had attacked Rome in retaliation for the League's advances. Pope Clement VII was now his prisoner and Catherine's nephew made his influence felt. Clement gained his freedom in December, but the emperor had no interest in peace talks with the League. Once again, Charles had frustrated Henry's plans and he declared war with the Holy Roman Emperor in January. However, England lacked the finances to do any more than declare itself at war; it's unlikely that this worried Charles too much. The situation in Europe finally resolved itself in 1529 with the Treaty of Cambrai. However, Henry's determination to end his marriage had made enemies out of his old allies. Francis offered to plead his case to the new Pope Clement, but he was more concerned with cementing his own alliance with the Holy See. Anne Boleyn's pregnancy pushed Henry into taking decisive action and his marriage to Catherine was annulled by Thomas Cranmer in 1533. In the eyes of the English court, his secret marriage to Anne was now completely legal. Finally, Henry was recognised as Head of the Church and abolished the right of Appeal to Rome. England was no longer Catholic and the pope had no more influence over the king.

> "Overjoyed at having the queen he lusted after, Henry realised that a Europe united against him was dangerous"

Although he was overjoyed at finally having the queen he lusted after, Henry realised that a Europe united against him was a dangerous prospect indeed. He tried to take advantage of the frequent arguments between Charles and Francis, but in 1538 the excommunication order for Henry was finally delivered and the pope declared that the Vatican would support anyone who deposed the English king; his death was something God would turn a blind eye to. Luckily for Henry, Charles was busy with the Ottoman Empire and, if Francis planned to attack England, he had no intention of doing so alone. Henry knew that the differences between Francis and Charles would prevent them from ever remaining allies for long. He just had to be patient. Finally, in 1542, they declared war and Henry could return to the battlefield.

By this point Henry was obese, sickly and prone to violent rages. The war gave him a sense of

The Siege of Boulogne

19 July – 18 September 1544

The Siege of Boulogne would be the closest thing to an unqualified victory that Henry would get in all his years of war with France. However, the conquest of a single city at tremendous expense tells us that unqualified is not really the most accurate adjective to use. Henry had been waiting for an excuse to resume hostilities with France and he eagerly joined his old ally (and old enemy) Charles V when war broke out in 1544. He raised a huge invasion force to set sail across the Channel.

The English force was split into two;=, attacking Montreuil and Boulogne, with Henry himself joining the latter. While the attack on Montreuil failed, the Siege of Boulogne, though lengthy, would result in success. The siege began on 19 July and the English forces quickly took the lower part of the city. However, they were unable to breach the castle walls and the siege stretched from weeks into months. Henry wrote to his wife (number six, Catherine Parr) praising the strength of his opponents, but it was only a matter of time before the French were forced to surrender, which they did after Henry's forces tunnelled beneath the walls.

However, Henry's triumph would be short-lived. He learned that Charles, fearful of the Ottoman threat and caring little about Henry's personal ambition, had made his own peace treaty with France without England. Henry returned home to attend to Scotland, leaving Boulogne occupied, and Francis began preparations for a counterattack.

Verdict

Henry may have taken the city, but the financial cost was enormous. Although Charles's treaty led to threats of a French invasion, Francis's attempts ultimately failed.

Charles Brandon, First Duke of Suffolk, was left to defend Boulogne after Henry returned to England

purpose and Charles was finally back on his side. For all their past differences, now there were no personal reasons why Henry and Charles could not resume their alliance. Catherine of Aragon had passed away and, by executing Anne Boleyn, Henry had removed the insult to Charles' honour. Across the Channel, Francis wasn't sitting idly by and he knew how to keep Henry distracted.

Scotland had proved to be a continual thorn in Henry's paw during his attempts to invade France, attacking every time his attention was focused across the Channel. Having hoped that James V would be a more amenable ally than his predecessor, Henry was livid when Scotland refused to follow him in separating from Rome. When James did not appear at the diplomatic talks at York in 1541, outright conflict followed. Following a minor Scottish victory at the Battle of Haddon Rig in 1542, the two armies met at Solway Moss. In a brutal echo of Flodden Field, the Scottish army suffered a humiliating defeat. James V died of fever about two weeks later and Henry, once again buoyed by such a decisive victory, turned his attention to France.

Henry was taking no half measures and invaded France on two fronts. Stretching his finances as far as they would go, he sent troops to Montreuil under the Duke of Norfolk, while another force attacked Boulogne under the Duke of Suffolk. While Norfolk failed, Suffolk succeeded. Henry himself arrived to take charge of the siege which lasted from July until September when the city fell. He basked in the glory of a French city claimed, but his elation was short-lived. Henry was forced to turn his attention back to Scotland, where a rebellion had sprung up. His retaliation was so brutal that it became known as the 'Rough Wooing'.

The Rough Wooing

December 1543 – March 1550

The Rough Wooing was the result of Henry's failed attempt to subdue Scotland while he turned his attention to France. Although he might have won a huge victory at the Battle of Solway Moss, Henry's hopes that the Scottish would be amenable to peace proved to be ill-founded. He had given them his terms, but Henry may as well have given them a blank piece of paper, as Scotland declared its renewed allegiance to France.

At the time, Henry was planning his invasion with Charles V and could not afford to be distracted by yet another full-blown conflict with his neighbours in the north. Deciding against open battle, Henry commanded that a force should sail north and show the Scots how furious he was. It was led by Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, who was told to "Burn Edinburgh town, so razed and defaced when you have sacked and gotten what you can of it, as there may remain forever a perpetual memory of the vengeance of God."

Towns and villages were to be burned down and destroyed, and the king's strict instructions as to what to do with anyone who opposed Hertford were clear; he was commanded to continue "putting man, woman and child to fire and sword, without exception, where any resistance shall be made against you." Hertford obeyed his liege's orders with relish, sending frequent reports of his conquests back to his king, and capturing Edinburgh and the nearby port at Leith. However, France did not sit idly by, but instead sent forces to help Scottish counterattacks. This dual campaign of aggression between England and Scotland would only be (temporarily) halted by the Treaty of Camp in 1546.

Verdict

Although it had the immediate effect that Henry wanted, which was to give a show of force and wrath, the Rough Wooing only served to deeper entrench hatred and distrust of the English.

The invasion of France fell apart when Charles signed another continental peace treaty that excluded England. Francis had no intention of making peace with Henry and mounted an invasion in the summer of 1545. It was a very real threat but, fortunately for Henry, the attack was a dismal failure and Francis was forced to retreat. The Treaty of Camp brought an end to the years of war in Henry's reign, as England, France, Scotland and the Holy Roman Empire agreed to peace in 1546.

He died a year later, sickly, angry and defeated. So what does Henry VIII's history as a military commander show us? It shows him to be a man unable or unwilling to grow out of the romantic, heroic dreams of his youth. He was constantly fighting for the glory that he saw for himself and for England. In his mind, France was English property that no one before him had been able to claim. He saw himself as the king who would bring it under English rule, and it was a childhood dream that became an adult delusion. By joining with allies who had no interest in his dream, and reacting rashly to insults, real and imagined, Henry spent many years at war with little to show for it.

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1500 – 1558

King Charles I of Spain

The heir of three of Europe's leading dynasties and future Holy Roman Emperor, Charles I of Spain was arguably the most powerful man in the world, with a reign typified by military success and territorial expansion

The closest thing to an Emperor of Europe that ever existed during the 16th century, Charles I of Spain – who was also more importantly Holy Roman Emperor (see 'Charles I or Charles V?' boxout for more information) – was not only heir to three of Europe's leading dynasties but also ruler of extensive territories that stretched throughout Europe and the Americas. Indeed, as well as controlling the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, parts of Italy and France, Charles also benefitted much territorially by the conquests of the Spanish conquistadores, with men like Hernan Cortes granting him control of large parts of modern day South America.

> Charles, especially in his later life, became famous for his deformed lower jaw, the product of centuries of royal inbreeding

Charles was, however, born as the eldest son of Philip I of Castile in the Flemish city of Ghent in 1500, where he both received his education and cultural mindset. At the age of six Charles inherited his father's Burgundian Low Countries' territories and by the time he was 15, he could famously speak multiple languages including German, French and Flemish. At 15 the first test for Charles as a ruler occurred, with a rebellion of Frisian peasants scoring a series of military victories over Charles' forces. Charles didn't panic, however, and after consulting with his advisers, managed to push the rebels back and, eventually, capture their leaders and decapitate them. It was Charles' first taste of war.

> During his reign Charles oversaw much of Spain's colonisation of the Americas

While Charles was being blooded in the Netherlands, his mother Joanna Queen of Castile was ensuring his succession in Spain. This came to a head in 1516 when Charles' grandfather King Ferdinand II of Aragon died, with Joanna then also inheriting the Crown of Aragon, a rule that included the lands of Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, Naples, Sicily and Sardinia.

Joanna used this opportunity to finalise Charles' succession, with it being arranged that he was named King of Castile and Aragon, and that he would rule jointly with his mother till her death. One year later Charles arrived in Spain to survey and control his new territories.

Due to Queen Joanna still being alive and the perception of Charles as

King Charles I of Spain

Charles spent much of his reign fighting the forces of Suleiman the Magnificent's Ottoman Empire

CHARLES I OF SPAIN

Spain, 1500-1558

Brief Bio

A member of the woefully inbred Habsburg family line, Charles suffered from genetic defects including an incredibly painful jaw disorder; a family trait that unfortunately makes a Habsburg stand out a mile in any portrait. Ruling a large European territory as Holy Roman Emperor, he brought Spain into the mix of Dutch, German, Italian and French domains that he ruled.

Kings of Spain: Philip II (1527-1598) and Charles I (1500-1558)

a foreigner, his arrival was not met with widespread acclaim by the local population and the Spanish officials treated him with great suspicion. Indeed, Charles was only finally confirmed as monarch after signing an agreement that mandated that he learn to speak Castilian, not to promote foreigners to court, respect the rights of his mother and not to take Spain's precious metals out of the region. Charles agreed to this and was begrudgingly accepted as ruler and for the following two years everything was going to plan, with Charles laying down his own style of rule and policies.

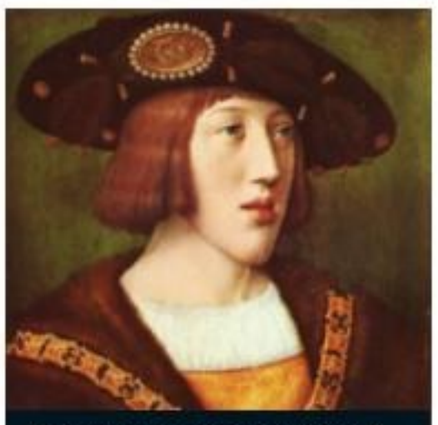
However, in 1520, due to Charles placing a high taxation rate on all his Spanish territories, a revolt sprung up. Challenged for the first time in Spain, Charles brought the full military might of his forces down upon the rebellion and, after learning how to deal with such uprisings in the Netherlands, brutally put it down quickly. With his Spanish territories now pacified, the young and powerful king then looked to expand his already impressive lands. He had much success too, capturing Milan in 1522 off a Franco-Swiss army at Bicocca and then Lombardy in 1525. In 1527 Charles even managed to sack the grand city of Rome, virtually imprisoning the pope – his power was seemingly uncheckable.

However, Charles was soon to be tested like never before in battle, with the mighty forces of the Ottoman Empire's Suleiman the Magnificent invading Europe and making a beeline for Charles' central territories. A wave of terror spread throughout Europe, with Suleiman not only scoring numerous naval victories in the Mediterranean but also sacking and ravaging all European lands his men touched. Charles was forced to immediately divert his attentions to repelling Suleiman and, after bringing his considerable military might down upon the Ottomans, finally managed to check them at the Siege of Vienna in 1529. Despite Charles' victory, Sulieman continued to haunt Charles and Europe in general, continuously breaking trade routes and devastating the Spanish and Italian coasts.

For a while, the threat of Suleiman – while not removed – was muted enough for Charles to consider his newfound lands in the Americas. Spanish conquistadores like the famous Hernan Cortes had been claiming much land in South America and dedicating it to Charles as King of Spain. These territories were rich in precious metals and as such Charles realised that they could prove invaluable in funding his empire. However, Charles was also seemingly concerned about the methods in which the resources and territories were being attained, with Cortes and company frequently slaughtering local populaces to ensure domination. This concern would eventually come to a head when Charles personally convened the famous Valladolid Conference to specifically decide how the lands and people of the New World should be treated.

Despite spending the majority of his reign fighting a series of enemies, Charles would eventually die not from battle but malaria

Charles' American diversion could not last long though, as in 1536 and then 1542, Charles' french enemy King Francis I allied himself with Suleiman against the Holy Roman Emperor in order to check his power and control over, not just the lands of Europe, but also its religion. This agreement led to the Franco-Ottoman alliance and caused Charles no end of trouble, with a series of wars between the three powers ensuing



A portrait of a young Charles I from 1515. Charles was crowned king a year later

Charles depicted enthroned above his defeated rivals – note Suleiman the Magnificent on the far left

Timeline

1500

Charles born
Charles was born as the eldest son of King Philip I of Castile and Joanna the Mad – a name most likely granted due to probable schizophrenia – in the Flemish city of Ghent. He would go on to be tutored by William de Croy.
24 February 1500

Comuneros revolt
Following Charles taking the kingship of Castile and then proceeding to tax the region heavily to fight his many wars, the citizens revolted and Charles suppressed them brutally. Castile was then absorbed into the larger Habsburg empire officially.
1520

Isabella of Portugal
Charles marries his cousin Isabella of Portugal on March 10th in Seville. Isabella would proceed to take over administrative duties of Spain, with Charles frequently away in his foreign territories. Their son Philip would eventually succeed Charles as King of Spain.
1526

Suleiman stopped
Suleiman the Magnificent's Ottoman Empire invades central Europe, with the forces taking much territory. However, Charles checks them at Vienna and the advance is fatally halted. Suleiman however wins control of the Eastern Mediterranean.
1529

Crowned by pope
Despite being elected as Holy Roman Emperor in June 1519, Charles is only eventually crowned thus 11 years later, with Pope Clement VII conducting the ceremony in Bologna. Charles would be the last Holy Roman Emperor to receive a papal coronation.
1530

"In many respects Charles reigned very well, inheriting and then controlling a simply massive empire"

throughout the 1530s and 1540s. In fact, the on-off fighting was only finally brought to a partial close with Charles' acceptance of the Truce of Adrianople in 1547. Charles did not want to sign the treaty, however the cost of continuous warfare was bankrupting his lands.

Indeed, with Charles frequently away fighting wars and leaving his lands in the administrative control of others, soon he found his power curtailed, specifically in Germany, the heartland of his Holy Roman Empire. As the year of 1550 rolled around, this unrest and usurpation of power spread into the Netherlands and Charles, realising that a full-blown rebellion was likely on the cards, introduced the death penalty there for any cases of heresy and political dissent.

At this point, whether it was obvious to Charles or not, he was now attempting to put out fires that had been kindled by decades of hard rule, high taxation and a nomadic lifestyle. Charles was now 50 and he increasingly found he had neither the will nor the energy to prop up his massive empire. Further, as he entered his fifties a deformity that he had lived with all his life, an enlarged lower jaw, got significantly worse, leaving him with chronic jaw pain and an inability to chew foods properly. Thanks to a life of consuming little but red meat, he also began suffering seriously from gout, which became incredibly painful.

During his later life Charles also became famous for his chronic gout, which caused him much pain

Realising his time was almost up, Charles then decided to end his king- and emperorship on his own terms, abdicating his rule of the Netherlands in 1555, then his rule of the Spanish and Holy Roman Empires in 1556, with his son Philip appointed to succeed him. Following the abdications, Charles self-confined himself to the monastery of St. Yuste in Extremadura, where he was cared for in the last years of his life. Two years later, in 1558, Charles died after contracting malaria, with his body then buried at the monastery.

So what of Charles' reign? In many respects Charles reigned very well, inheriting and then controlling a simply massive empire where he, not only protected it, but expanded it considerably. Further, he frequently succeeded on the battlefield and was politically savvy enough to hold the other rulers in and around Europe from himself and his interests at arm's length. In addition, unlike many other kings of the age, despite his constant warring, Charles was not reported to be bloodthirsty, with him reportedly having strong distaste for combat. On the other hand however, Charles left the Habsburg Empire financially destitute, with Spain near-bankrupt, and this lands of Germany and the Netherlands bitterly divided over religion.

A famous portrait of Charles from 1548 painted by the old master, Titian

Charles in the armour of the Holy Roman Emperor

Charles I or Charles V?

As well as being Charles I of Spain, Charles was also Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Here we explain how exactly that happened...

Today, Charles I of Spain is not remembered thus but instead as the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. The Holy Roman Emperor was the leader of the Holy Roman Empire, which was formed out of the remnants of the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 408 and then the Carolingian Empire in the late 880s. The Empire consisted of a series of multi-ethnic territories in central Europe – with Germany being the largest – that over period of 600 years dominated the politics and religion of the region, with its leader – the titular Emperor – crowned by the Catholic pope in Rome.

Charles I's grandfather was Maximilian I, who was King of Germany not Spain, as well as being Holy Roman Emperor. However, upon Maximilian's death, the complex laws of hereditary meant that he was the frontrunner as the new Emperor, with a council of electors eventually choosing him to succeed to the crown of the Holy Roman Empire – note, not the Spanish crown (King of Castile), which he had already accepted in 1516, or the rulership of the Netherlands and Burgundy, which he had inherited in 1506 – in 1519. Charles, however, was not officially the Holy Roman Emperor until he was crowned thus by Pope Clement VII in Rome 11 years later in 1530.

Further, despite officially abdicating as Holy Roman Emperor in 1556 in favour of his brother Ferdinand, the Holy Roman Empire's Imperial Diet did not accept the succession technically, so while Ferdinand was in fact the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire from 1556 onwards, it was not until the year of Charles' death two years later that he was officially recognised thus.

Due to the size and importance of the Holy Roman Empire in its day, its titular leader trumps that of Spain's monarch, leading to the history books favouring Charles V over Charles I.

Revolt of Ghent
Along with help from the Duke of Alba, Charles personally suppresses a revolt in Ghent, where political dissent had been firmly controlled for decades. The revolt was instigated by high taxation. After the revolt, Charles stripped the city of all its legal and political freedoms.
1539

Valladolid debate
Charles convenes a conference at Valladolid in order to consider the morality of using force against the indigenous populations of the New World, which Spain was taking a lead in colonising and exploiting. Unfortunately, little consequence comes of the debate.
1550

Protestant rebellion
Protestant princes, in alliance with King Henry II of France, rebel against Charles' Roman Catholic rule in central Europe, forcing him to retreat into the Netherlands. Charles abdicated his rule of the Netherlands three years later.
1552

Abdication nation
After previously abdicating his rule of the Netherlands and the county of Charolais the previous year, Charles finally abdicated his Spanish Empire in January. It is passed on to his son Philip, who already controlled Naples and Sicily.
1556

Charles dies
After living in self-imposed exile at the monastery of Yuste in Extremadura for two years, Charles eventually dies from an attack of malaria. His remains were buried at the monastery, however, 26 years later they were transferred to the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.
21 September 1558

1558

© Alamy

ELIZABETH I

British, 1533 – 1603

Brief Bio

Elizabeth assumed the throne after the death of her Catholic sister Mary, upon which she faced an unstable nation torn apart by religious conflict. Over the course of her reign she fought enemies at home and abroad, uniting England under one church and oversaw the exploration of new lands.

1533 – 1603

The turbulent reign of Elizabeth I

She fought off foreign invasions and domestic rebellions but did she really preside over a golden age?

In 1588, against the advice of her most trusted aides, Elizabeth I rode out on her grey gelding to address her troops gathered at Tilbury in Essex in preparation of repelling the expected invasion force of the Spanish Armada. Looking out at the assembled faces before her, she delivered a speech that would go down in history and for many would forever define her: "I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king – and of a king of England too."

The speech would have to be transcribed and redistributed for the soldiers who were unable to hear the queen but they had all seen their monarch, armoured and on her steed, ready to stand by them to repel the Catholic invasion. This image of Elizabeth has been the key to our popular perception of her for centuries, but there's much more to her. Elizabeth was cunning and capricious, but she could be blinded by affection, if only temporarily. She was tremendously clever, with an almost unfailing sense of what her people wanted

or needed from her, but had to see off foreign invasion attempts and homegrown rebellions. While she was sitting on the throne of England the country became acquainted with some of its greatest triumphs and darkest hours.

When Elizabeth came to the throne in November 1558, the whole of Europe was on tenterhooks. How would the new Protestant queen follow the reign of her Catholic sister Mary? With an unstable nation and conspiracies at home and abroad, the situation required diplomacy, intelligence and bravery; three qualities which Elizabeth had always had in ample supply. In fact, the unstable situation was nothing new to her; Elizabeth's position had been precarious from the moment she was born. The daughter of Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn, she was immediately deemed as illegitimate by any Catholic nations, who regarded the king's divorce of Catherine of Aragon as illegal. In their eyes, Catherine's daughter Mary was the only rightful heir to the throne.

Although both parents had been desperate for a boy, Anne would be a doting mother to her infant child, but she was sent to the executioner's block in 1536 after failing to produce a male heir for her king. Although Henry's third wife Jane Seymour was kind to Elizabeth and Mary, she had her own child to attend to with the birth of her son and Henry's heir, Edward. Henry himself would not see much of Elizabeth until 1542, when he decided the time had come to reacquaint himself with his young daughter. He found her to be intelligent and charming, and decided that he would reinstate both Mary and Elizabeth back into his lineage.

In 1543, Henry married Catherine Parr, his last wife, and relations within the royal family warmed, as Mary took a maternal interest in young Edward, while Elizabeth enjoyed a sisterly relationship with both. However, when Edward took the throne upon their father's death, cracks started to form. First, Elizabeth had to contend with the amorous attentions of Catherine's new husband Thomas Seymour, which caused a scandal at court in 1548. Seymour's intentions were seen as treasonous, and Elizabeth was reported to be pregnant. The young princess denied these rumours, confounding her interrogator. "She hath a very good wit and nothing is gotten of her but by great policy," he wrote. This

"She was tremendously clever, with an almost unfailing sense of what her people wanted, or needed from her"

How good was Elizabeth at balancing the books?

While the popular image is that Mary left England in a sorry state, Leanda de Lisle explains that Elizabeth's fiscal behaviour was far from immaculate. Mary left England £227,000 in debt, while her sister produced debts of £350,000. "Mary's reign was not a 'disaster'. The popular image of Mary – always 'Bloody Mary', rarely Mary I – has been greatly influenced by a combination of sexual and religious prejudice," explains De Lisle. "Mary I had named Elizabeth as her heir, despite her personal feelings towards her sister, and so allowed the crown to be inherited peacefully. Elizabeth continued to refuse to name anyone. In 1562, believing she was dying, she asked for Robert Dudley to be made Lord Protector with an income of £20,000." Elizabeth was notoriously reluctant to engage in warfare because of its costs and risk, but the Spanish conflict dragged on for years, while she awarded monopolies to her favourites at court and crops failed. "While we remember Elizabeth's success in repelling the Armada in 1588," says De Lisle, "We forget that the war continued and impoverished the country and the crown, a situation made worse by the corruption of court officials including notorious high-ranking figures such as Robert Cecil. People starved in the 1590s and the elite even began to fear possible revolution."

Verdict

Elizabeth was forced to deal with circumstances beyond her control, such as poor harvests and an ongoing conflict with Spain, but the fact is that she was not the financial marvel many believe her to be.

Borrowing money in the 16th century

Before the English merchant Thomas Gresham came to prominence, the Tudors had borrowed money from the great European banks such as the Antwerp Exchange. However, these banks charged a high interest rate and it was generally acknowledged that going around Europe borrowing money did nothing to improve England's image as a serious power. Money could also be borrowed from independent merchants, such as Horatio Palavicino, from whom Elizabeth was forced to borrow money late in her reign. Gresham had previously helped Edward VI rid himself of most of his debts and founded the Royal Exchange in 1571 to challenge the power of Antwerp.

Now that Elizabeth could seek loans from within her realm, she was able to exert greater pressure to get what she wanted, while Parliament could grant her more funds if they chose. Royal revenues were supposed to cover the basic expenses of governance, while Parliament could add to the war chest. Later in her reign, she began to use increasingly severe taxation, which contributed to her decreasing popularity.

Queen Elizabeth I opening the Royal Exchange

Picture depicting the coronation of Elizabeth I in 1558

Portrait of Mary, Queen of Scots, who was executed after being found guilty of plotting against Elizabeth I

practice would serve her well once Mary took the throne but not all players were as skilled in the game of thrones; Seymour was executed the following year.

When the staunchly Catholic Mary refused to convert, Edward began proceedings to remove both his sisters from the line to the throne, fixing his hopes on his cousin, Lady Jane Grey, instead. However, the prince was seldom in good health during his short life, so it was no surprise that he died before the contract could be finalised and Mary became the new Queen of England. Just as Edward had asked Mary to change her faith, the new queen was determined that her sister should convert. She acquiesced without enthusiasm, but it was clear to both Protestants and Catholics that her true allegiance still lay with her father's Church of England rather than the Pope's Catholic Church. Over the course of Mary's reign, many conspiracy plots were designed to get Elizabeth onto the throne. None of them succeeded, but they did almost manage to get her killed.

In 1554, Thomas Wyatt attempted a rebellion following the announcement that Mary would marry the Spanish king Philip. The queen's reprisal was brutal and swift, executing not only the ringleaders, but Jane Grey as well. Elizabeth claimed ignorance, a trick she managed to successfully repeat a year later after another attempted rebellion in 1555, but her sister's patience was wearing thin and Elizabeth was placed in the Tower of London, with some Catholic supporters clamouring for her execution.

Was a religious compromise met?

The Church of England was one of compromise and middle ground. While Elizabeth was a Protestant, she didn't hold the puritanical beliefs of some of her council members. She introduced the Act of Supremacy in 1558, which reaffirmed England's separation from Rome and established her as the head of the Church. Elizabeth understood the dangers of trying to impose religion and allowed Catholicism to continue, provided it took place in secret.

However, Leanda de Lisle reminds us that we should not forget Elizabeth's willingness to crack down when necessary. "Elizabeth's conservatism and pragmatism has seen her described as a religious moderate, in contrast to the 'fanatical' Mary," she explains. "But as the new Protestant Queen of a largely Catholic country Elizabeth was necessarily moderate, and as her reign grew longer, she proved that, like Mary, she could be utterly ruthless when faced by a threat. The hundreds of executions of villagers following the Northern Rebellion far exceeded anything her predecessors had done in similar circumstances; her later persecution of Catholics was also relentless and cruel. It is a little-known fact that she also burned heretics – namely Anabaptists – these were far fewer in number than Mary's victims, but then there weren't that many Anabaptists!" She executed both Protestants and Catholics for publicly disobeying the laws of the Church of England. However, events in Europe show the English Queen in a much more favourable light. Comparatively, Elizabeth was extremely tolerant. The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris showed the fervour with which Catholic Europeans detested Protestants. She was also much more tolerant than many of her advisors.

Verdict

Elizabeth successfully found a moderate middle ground in a very turbulent time during her reign, but would crack down mercilessly if the rules she had laid down were broken.

Catholic

1 The services were held in Latin, countermanding the reformation's ideal that everyone should be able to understand. The English prayer book was banned.

2 Church furnishings were restored to their former lavish state and the buildings were now decorated completely with Catholic artwork.

3 Catholic Mass was reintroduced, and Holy Communion was now banned by law.

4 The clergy were not allowed to marry. Priests who had married before the new law came into effect were given a choice of two options: leave their families or lose their job.

C of E

1 The image of the minister became much simpler. They were not allowed to wear Roman Catholic vestments, such as the surplice.

2 All rood lofts, a screen portraying the crucifixion, a common feature in Catholic churches, were removed. The Pope was not the head of the church.

3 The Bishop's Bible, which was in English rather than Latin, was restored, opening it up to a wider readership.

4 There was a general removal of 'superstition', such as making the sign of the cross during communion. Simplicity was what the Puritans strived for.

"The queen's reprisal was brutal and swift, executing not only the ringleaders, but also Jane Grey"

Elizabeth's future prospects were looking anything but golden, and the next few months saw her walking a political tightrope. Mary, desperate to provide her husband and her country with a Catholic heir to end the uncertainty surrounding the throne, announced that she was pregnant, but by 1558, it became clear that Mary's condition was not pregnancy, but a devastating illness. Her health broke quickly, and she died on 17 November of that year after begging Elizabeth to keep England Catholic once she took the throne. Her wishes would not be fulfilled.

Elizabeth's coronation was a stunning balancing act. With countless eyes waiting for any hint of an overtly Protestant or Catholic gestures, Elizabeth managed to confound them all. Instead, the emphasis was elsewhere: Elizabeth's intention to restore England to a state of prosperity. The new queen knew that if she was to have any chance of surviving her early years she would need trusted and astute advisors, and chose William Cecil and Robert Dudley. Cecil had worked for Edward, survived the reign of Mary and was fiercely loyal to Elizabeth. In contrast, Dudley's appointment and favour with the queen had nothing to do with his abilities as a politician. He had known Elizabeth since childhood and her affection for him had only grown stronger, and rumours abounded that she spent the nights as well as the days with him.

Cecil disapproved of Dudley and agreed with the majority of Parliament that Elizabeth should marry as soon as possible. The eyes of France and Spain were fixed on England and it made sense for the queen to create a marriage alliance with one of these major powers for her and the country's

Did Elizabeth have a genuine thirst for new worlds?

Although the expansion of trade into India occurred during Elizabeth's reign, in terms of exploration she is best remembered for England's attempt to colonise North America. The Spanish and Portuguese had already laid claim to much of South America, establishing lucrative trade routes, but North America was relatively unexplored. Elizabeth was reluctant to fund exploratory voyages for much the same reasons that she was reluctant to fund wars: they were expensive and risky. However, she could be won around with the promise of riches from one of her favourites and, when sailor Davy Ingram returned to England with alluring tales of riches and simple inhabitants, geographer Richard Hakluyt began plotting a serious expedition to be led by Walter Raleigh.

With the promise of fortune and the flattery of Raleigh, she agreed to a trip to form a colony named after her: Virginia. The first party launched, and Raleigh would follow. When the nobleman arrived, he saw the settlement had failed. The English were desperate to leave. Raleigh's second attempt was intended for Chesapeake Bay, but the first group, led by John White, returned to Roanoke. Raleigh arrived with his second group and found no trace of survivors. Elizabeth was disappointed that these costly ventures yielded no results. There was one purpose to these expeditions, as de Lisle explains very simply: "Making money."

Verdict

The Elizabethan era's reputation for exploration is largely due to the fact that there was money to be made from it. Piratical ventures were profitable; colonisation was not.

2. 1585
Following a positive report, Raleigh dispatches colonists to settle at Roanoke in Virginia. By the time he arrives on a later ship, the crops have failed and the English are desperate to leave.

3. 1587
Raleigh tries again to establish a colony at Chesapeake Bay, but instead the settlers travel to Roanoke. When Raleigh arrives, all 150 colonists have disappeared, with only a single skeleton remaining.

1. 1584
Walter Raleigh and Richard Hakluyt convince Elizabeth to fund an expedition to explore the possibility that a colony could be founded on America's east coast.

safety. King Philip II made no secret of his desire to marry Elizabeth, but she had no interest in marrying Mary's former husband. Henry of Anjou was suggested as a match, but he was still a child. Elizabeth spoke instead of being married to her nation, but scandal struck when Dudley's wife Amy died suddenly after apparently falling down the stairs in 1560. It was rumoured that Dudley had committed the deed for his queen, and Elizabeth was forced to expel him from her court.

In 1561, Elizabeth's cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, returned to Scotland from France. For many Catholics, Mary was the true successor and she did little to downplay those clamouring for a Catholic monarch. Her arrival was perfectly timed, as Elizabeth was on the verge of death due to smallpox. However, she recovered and, with the scandal over Dudley dissipating, Elizabeth chose him to be Lord Protector, bringing him back into her court, before shocking everyone by suggesting a marriage between him and Mary. This was Elizabeth showing her political astuteness; she knew well that Scotland with a Catholic heir would

"The Queen rallied troops by declaring that she would fight by their side to repel anyone who dare set foot on their land"

have too much power, but an heir produced by her favourite and Mary, Queen of Scots could potentially unite the two countries. However, Dudley refused and Mary had no interest in marrying her cousin's paramour.

Instead, Mary married for love, choosing Lord Henry Darnley. Seeing this may have prompted Elizabeth to renew her interest in Dudley, which greatly upset the council, in particular the ambitious Lord Norfolk. When the tension between Norfolk and Dudley grew too great, Elizabeth understood that she needed to assert her authority. "I will have here but one mistress and no master," she told Dudley. It was both a political statement and a personal one. The lack of a husband and heir was only made worse in 1566 when Mary gave birth to a son, James, but she was desperately unhappy. Darnley was a violent, drunken husband: many believed he brutally murdered her secret lover, David Rizzio. Darnley would meet his own nasty end a year later, when he was found strangled in the garden of a house. Mary quickly married the Earl of Bothwell, the man who had allegedly murdered Darnley, and Scottish forces rose against her. Imprisoned and forced to abdicate, she eventually fled to England. Elizabeth agreed to give Mary shelter, but her arrival in the north had given Catholics a figurehead and rebellion brewed.

The northern Earls suggested that Norfolk should marry Mary: soon, the Northern Rebellion had begun. As the rebel forces marched south, Elizabeth moved Mary to Coventry and mustered troops of her own. The southern Earls rallied to her cause, which stunned the rebel forces, who began to retreat. Elizabeth's victory was quick and decisive, with 700 men being executed in a brutal display of power. Norfolk was placed under arrest, but a lack of concrete evidence postponed his execution, until he was implicated in the Ridolfi plot, which aimed to make Spain's Philip II king. Elizabeth ordered and rescinded Norfolk's execution three times – a prime example of how indecisive she could be at times – before finally deciding that he simply had to die.

If Elizabeth's position at home appeared shaky it was positively stable compared to how she was viewed abroad. The Pope decreed that anyone who murdered the heretical English queen would be forgiven, a statement King Philip took to heart. Not wanting to risk open war, Elizabeth found other ways to aggravate her enemies. She quietly patronised the piratical exploits of John Hawkins and later his cousin Francis Drake. In 1577, when he planned to travel to South America to raid Spanish gold, Elizabeth met Drake with Francis Walsingham, one of her ambassadors to France.

The cautious Cecil had to be kept in the dark, but she told Drake explicitly that she supported him: "I would gladly be revenged on the King of Spain for diverse injuries I have received." Having sailed through the Straits of Magellan and captured a Spanish ship carrying up to £200,000 in gold,

The return of Mary, Queen of Scots to Edinburgh

Queen Elizabeth I knighting Francis Drake in 1581

Drake decided to sail across the Pacific, becoming the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe. Elizabeth gloried in his achievement, and when she met the Spanish ambassador in 1581, she pointedly wore a crucifix Drake had given to her from the loot. She dined with Drake on the Golden Hind and knighted him. He had done her proud.

These piratical exploits stood in sharp contrast to the events of 1572. The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris – the assassination of a number of French Calvinist Protestants – shocked England and the ambassador Sir Francis Walsingham was forced to take refuge. Elizabeth brought him back to London to become her spymaster, where he advised that Mary, Queen of Scots was a real danger. The uprising was not only a shocking scene for English Protestants; it was also a sign that the Protestant Netherlands and their booming wool trade would soon be in danger.

When William the Silent asked Elizabeth for military assistance, she did not want to be seen to intervene and give Philip of Spain an excuse to attack. Walsingham counselled war, while Cecil continued to preach marriage. So Elizabeth entertained the idea of marrying the Duke of Anjou, roughly ten years after it had first been suggested. Then, he had been an ugly youth and she had been a beautiful queen. Now, she was visibly older and the flattery of the French ambassador and Anjou's letters began to win her over. When they finally met, it appeared that Elizabeth really was in love, but there were genuine concerns over how the English people would react.

"The anxieties Elizabeth expressed to the emissary of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1561, that she too could not marry anyone without triggering unrest in one group or another, only deepened following Mary, Queen of Scots's disastrous marriages to Darnley and then Bothwell – which ended in her overthrow," explains Leanda de Lisle, author of Tudor: The Family Story. "Elizabeth continued to look publicly for a husband to fulfil national expectations that she would provide them with an undisputed heir, and surely she hoped it was not impossible. She was married to her kingdom – a phrase she had learned from Mary Tudor. But while Mary had married, Elizabeth did not because she feared revolt by those who disapproved of her choice."

Although she clearly wanted to marry the man that she had nicknamed her "frog," the English people found the idea of their Virgin Queen marrying a French Catholic absolutely repulsive. When a pamphlet appeared that condemned the union, Elizabeth decreed that both the author and his printer should have their right hands cut off. Her Privy Council was split in half, with the jealous Robert Dudley vehemently opposed. Elizabeth was heartbroken, but she agreed to abstain. She gave Anjou £10,000 to continue his war against Philip in the Netherlands, but did not see him again. He tried to take power for himself but failed and died a year later. When William the Silent was assassinated in his own house in 1584

Main players of

Council and Government

William Cecil

1520-98

A canny political operator who understood the difficulties that were ahead, Cecil was Elizabeth's first appointment and was fiercely loyal, dedicating his life to helping her. Although he believed she should marry, Elizabeth knew Cecil was invaluable and pressured him into staying on, even when he was sickly and deaf.

Robert Dudley

1532-88

Dudley had known Elizabeth since childhood, and was her first love. His appointment to court had more to do with her affection for him than any outstanding abilities as a politician, however, and his presence at court proved to be a continual source of rumour and scandal. Their relationship was rocky and driven by passion.

Francis Walsingham

1532-90

The Protestant Walsingham was allowed to return to England after Mary's death, and quickly became one of Elizabeth's most invaluable assets. A brilliant spymaster and politician, he understood the threat that Mary, Queen of Scots posed, and engineered her downfall. He also supported Drake and Raleigh's explorations.

Family

Henry VIII

1491-1547

Henry was desperate for a boy to carry on his family name, and was disappointed when Anne Boleyn gave him Elizabeth. He was absent for much of her childhood, but was kept informed of her progress nonetheless. When he finally met his daughter he was very impressed, so much so that he reinstated her and Mary into his legacy.

Mary Tudor

1516-58

Despite their differences, Mary, Elizabeth and their brother Edward had a relatively close relationship as children. When she became Queen, Mary was desperate for Elizabeth to convert and unable to understand why she wouldn't. She came close to executing her sister, but abstained, finally requesting that she keep England Catholic.

Catherine Parr

1512-48

Catherine and Elizabeth became close during her marriage to Henry, and Elizabeth lived with Catherine for some time after his death. However, Catherine's husband Thomas Seymour was more interested in their young charge than his wife, and she assisted in his attempts at seduction, dying soon after they failed.

the golden age

Explorers

John Hawkins

1532-95

Hawkins may have possessed a coat of arms, but he first managed to find favour with the Queen as a pirate. With Elizabeth's implicit permission, he planned and executed a series of daring raids on Spanish ports in the West Indies, but after a disastrous third voyage he returned to England, where he began working for the Queen in a more direct capacity.

Francis Drake

1540-96

Having sailed on his cousin John Hawkins' expeditions, Francis Drake had no love for the Spanish. He was willing to circumnavigate the globe in order to rob them of their riches and deliver them to Elizabeth, who was delighted with his exploits, and continued to commission him to undertake raids on Spanish ports.

Walter Raleigh

1554-1618

Raleigh gained Elizabeth's favour at court and quickly set his sights on expanding her empire. He decided he would establish Britain's first colony in North America, and told the Queen it would be named after her: Virginia. To his great dismay, the colony at Roanoke failed. He is often falsely credited with bringing potatoes and tobacco to England.

Enemies

King Philip II

1527-1598

The main religious threat to Elizabeth for the majority of her realm came from the King of Spain. The Pope might have given the bull that deposed Elizabeth but the fiercely Catholic Philip was the man with the army that could enforce it. He had attempted to woo the princess while still married to her sister but, once rebuffed, relentlessly opposed her.

John Whitgift

1530-1604

As the issue of religious tolerance became increasingly difficult to manage, Elizabeth hand-picked her old chaplain for the role of Archbishop of Canterbury. He was a stubborn man, as evidenced by his refusal to leave England during Queen Mary's reign. Like Elizabeth, he was a Conformist and ruthlessly punished those who publicly strayed from the 'right' path.

Pope Pius V

1504-72

As the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Pius V saw Elizabeth's status of Queen of England and head of its church not only as an affront to his religion, but as an act of heresy. He went as far as to issue a Papal Bull on 27 April 1570, which declared that her subjects no longer owed her any kind of allegiance.

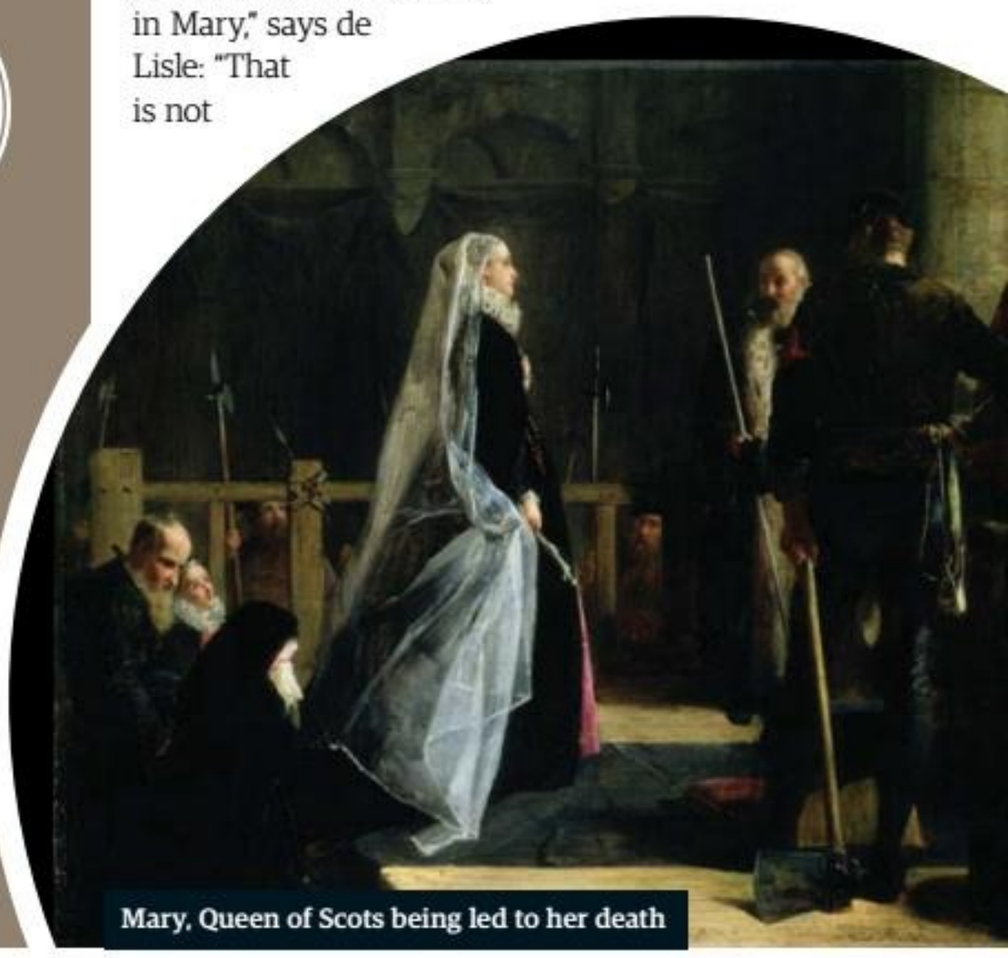
"She bitterly resented the circumstances of Mary's execution"

by a Catholic fanatic, it was clear that military intervention could not be put off any longer and so in 1585, to the relief of her impatient councillors, she agreed to send a small force of men. Dudley took command in the Netherlands but proved to be incompetent, losing territory to Philip's general, the Duke of Parma. Mary was now more dangerous than ever. Elizabeth ordered her imprisonment at the urging of Francis Walsingham, who had no intention of allowing her to live much longer. He arranged for a servant, one of his own spies, to suggest that Mary smuggle letters in beer barrels, allowing Walsingham to read everything. When Thomas Babingdon wrote to Mary with a plan to assassinate Elizabeth and give her the crown Mary wrote back with her approval; the spymaster's trap had worked perfectly, and he had ensnared his unwitting prey.

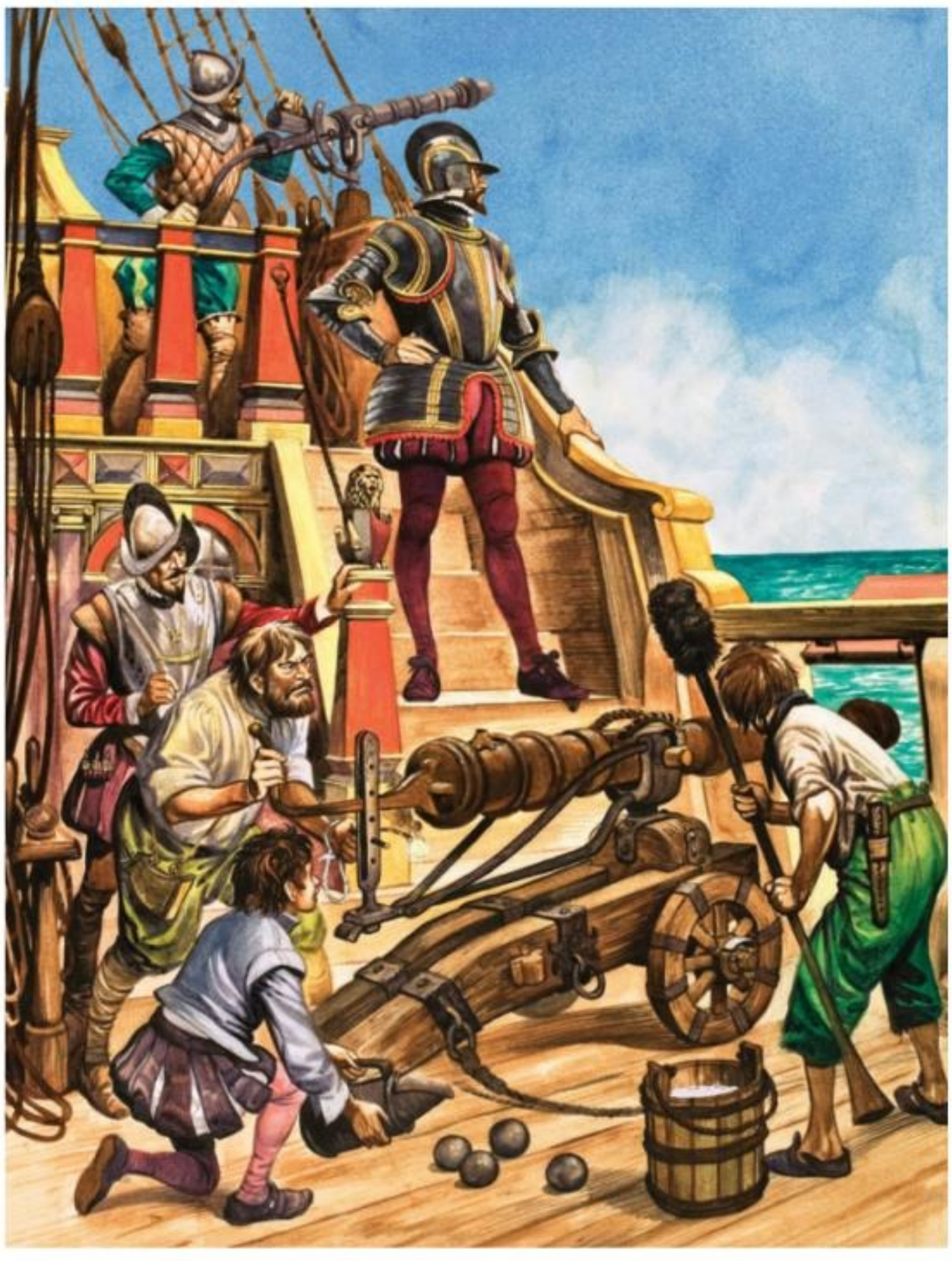
Walsingham leapt into action and ordered the conspirators' execution. Elizabeth had always been reluctant to execute her cousin, but she agreed she would have to stand trial. It was no surprise when the court decided that Mary should be put to death. Elizabeth grieved for Mary, or at least lamented her death. The man who had delivered the warrant was imprisoned and stripped of his title.

Elizabeth was always reluctant to sign a death warrant – or at least she was reluctant to be seen to sign it. We can't know how much of Elizabeth's grief was genuine, but she bitterly resented the circumstances of Mary's execution.

"Elizabeth was reluctant to be seen to execute first the senior nobleman in England, in Norfolk, and then a fellow queen, in Mary," says de Lisle: "That is not



Mary, Queen of Scots being led to her death



The Spanish Armada is put into disarray by English fireships on 8 August 1588

The gun-crew on an Elizabethan ship – she funded the journeys of numerous privateers

to say she regretted their deaths. She would have preferred to have Mary murdered, for example, as she made very clear.

It is also notable that she was quite ruthless in ordering the deaths of traitors of humble birth – the 900 or so executed after the Northern Rebellion testifies to that. This was three times the numbers Henry VIII had executed after the far more serious Pilgrimage of Grace, and ten times the numbers Mary executed after Wyatt's revolt."

Mary's execution provided Philip II with the reason he needed to declare war and his Spanish Armada co-ordinated with the Duke of Parma's forces in the Netherlands, with the two forces meeting before sailing on England.

They launched on 12 July 1588, their forces possessing more than twice the number of English ships, but the English ships did have some advantages; they were smaller, faster, and designed to carry guns rather than men. The English ships could outmanoeuvre the Spanish fleet in open water and began to engage them in small skirmishes. It was at this point that Elizabeth rode out to meet her troops. With the threat of a Catholic force at their doorstep, the queen rallied the spirit

"The queen rallied the spirit of the English troops by declaring that she would fight by their side"

of the English troops by declaring that she would fight by their side to repel anyone who dared to set foot on their land.

This grandstanding was impressive and may have gone down in history's annals but was ultimately unnecessary. The Spanish Armada failed and Elizabeth's victory was the seal on her status. 'The Golden Age' had begun, where art and literature flowered. With England a visibly powerful state, the aristocracy began to patronise the arts with great abandon.

The famous playwrights of the age enjoyed patronage, albeit with some caveats. When Shakespeare wrote Richard II he was encouraged to remove a scene suggesting the ageing monarch should step aside. "Elizabeth did not care for plays," confirms de Lisle: "All too often they were used to lecture her on this or that."

Her crown may have been safe for now, but she received devastating blows with the deaths of two of her most trusted advisors, Dudley and Walsingham. Dudley was replaced at court by his handsome stepson, the Earl of Essex, and the young flatterer quickly became her favourite.

"Robert Dudley's death in 1588 signalled the passing of the old order, but Elizabeth still hoped she could continue ruling according to her motto, 'Semper Eadem' ('Always the same')" explains de Lisle. "As the years began to pass and her servants died she either did not replace them or find a near-equivalent to the servant she had lost." It's a sign of how much she leaned on her old guard that she continued to place her trust in William

Did England become a nation to be feared?

Elizabeth's foreign policy was decidedly more cautious than expansive. She was desperate to avoid conflict because it was expensive and the outcome always uncertain. However, she had a spirit that could easily be won over by the idea of adventure. She delighted in the expeditions of John Hawkins and Francis Drake, which could be seen to be aggravating the King of Spain without actually declaring open conflict. In 1562, she agreed to a military expedition in Calais, which was crushed by Catherine de' Medici's forces, and this failure would influence her military decisions for the rest of her reign.

"There was no glory in it for Elizabeth as there was for a male monarch," Leanda de Lisle reveals. "She understood the truth of the adage of Mary of Hungary: that war made it impossible for a woman to rule effectively, 'all she can do is shoulder responsibility for mistakes committed by others.'"

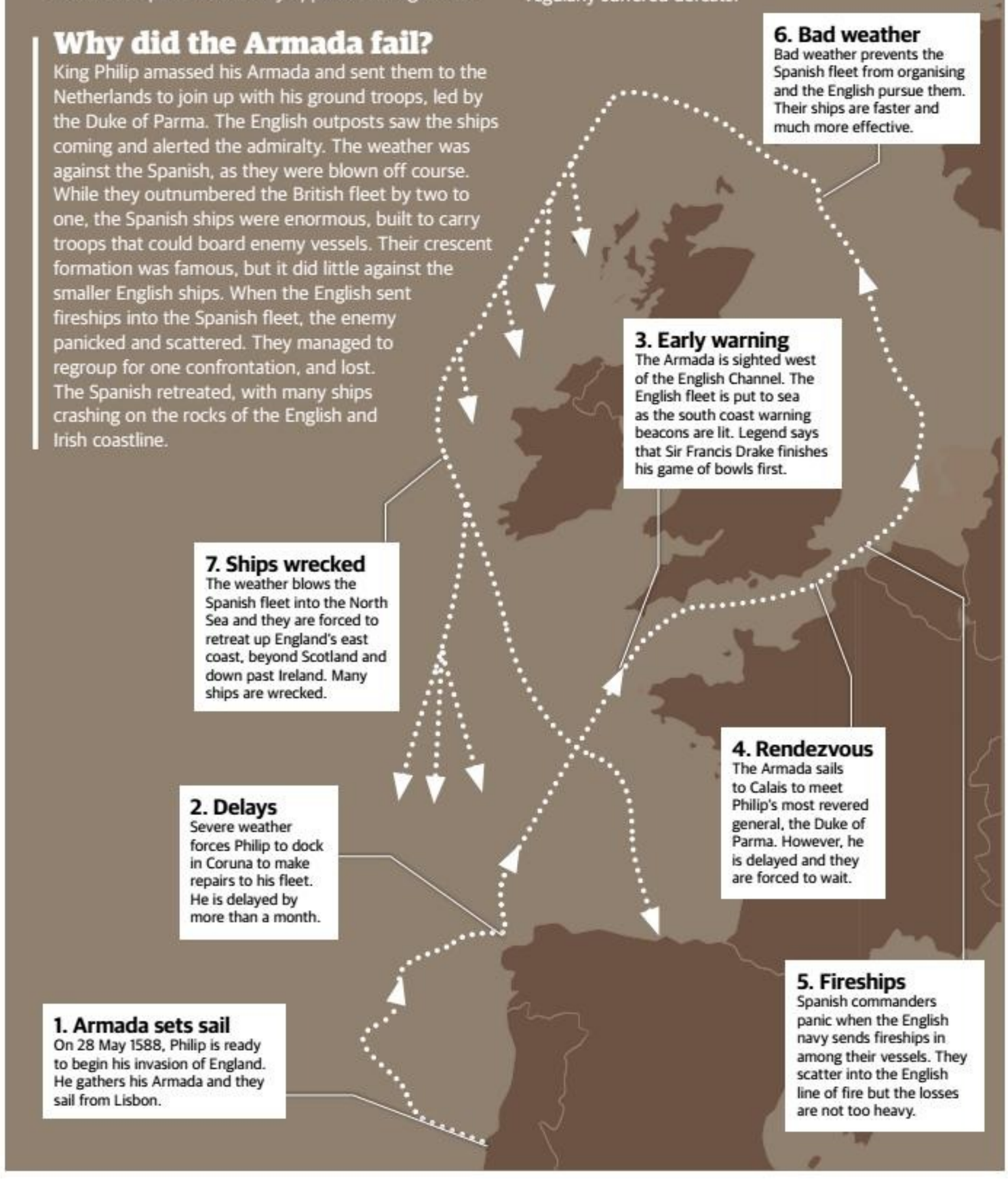
Her ally and enemy lines were drawn by religion. France and Spain were clearly opposed to England on these grounds, which is why her courtiers were so anxious that Elizabeth marry an eligible man from either country. Even after the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, Elizabeth was reluctant to be drawn into open war. The piecemeal way in which she gave the Dutch her assistance shows her reluctance to engage in open conflict of any kind, first offering financial support to the Dutch troops, then the Duke of Anjou, before finally agreeing to send an English force when there was no other option. Her cautious attitude towards foreign policy doubtless saved the kingdom a lot of money. However, it was taken out of her hands when the Spanish Armada sailed on England."

Verdict

The victory against the Armada was a shining moment but for the most part Elizabeth kept out of foreign conflict. When she didn't, she regularly suffered defeats.

Why did the Armada fail?

King Philip amassed his Armada and sent them to the Netherlands to join up with his ground troops, led by the Duke of Parma. The English outposts saw the ships coming and alerted the admiralty. The weather was against the Spanish, as they were blown off course. While they outnumbered the British fleet by two to one, the Spanish ships were enormous, built to carry troops that could board enemy vessels. Their crescent formation was famous, but it did little against the smaller English ships. When the English sent fireships into the Spanish fleet, the enemy panicked and scattered. They managed to regroup for one confrontation, and lost. The Spanish retreated, with many ships crashing on the rocks of the English and Irish coastline.


6. Bad weather
Bad weather prevents the Spanish fleet from organising and the English pursue them. Their ships are faster and much more effective.
3. Early warning
The Armada is sighted west of the English Channel. The English fleet is put to sea as the south coast warning beacons are lit. Legend says that Sir Francis Drake finishes his game of bowls first.
7. Ships wrecked
The weather blows the Spanish fleet into the North Sea and they are forced to retreat up England's east coast, beyond Scotland and down past Ireland. Many ships are wrecked.
4. Rendezvous
The Armada sails to Calais to meet Philip's most revered general, the Duke of Parma. However, he is delayed and they are forced to wait.
2. Delays
Severe weather forces Philip to dock in Coruna to make repairs to his fleet. He is delayed by more than a month.
5. Fireships
Spanish commanders panic when the English navy sends fireships in among their vessels. They scatter into the English line of fire but the losses are not too heavy.
1. Armada sets sail
On 28 May 1588, Philip is ready to begin his invasion of England. He gathers his Armada and they sail from Lisbon.

Cecil, even though he was almost entirely deaf and increasingly ill. It was only when he died in 1598 that Elizabeth finally agreed to appoint Robert Cecil to his father's old post. When it became known that the Spanish were attempting to rebuild their fleet, Essex led a fleet on Cadiz and decimated their forces in port. The success gave Essex fame, something Elizabeth was taken aback by. She tried to curb him, aware that her standing among the people was her greatest asset, but Essex continued to promote his own celebrity. She became more and more frustrated with his outrageous behaviour at court, which came to a dramatic head when he half-drew his sword on her in a fit of pique.

The arts and literature may have been flourishing, but those who subscribe to this being a golden age in England's history often forget that even after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, other uprisings, such as the 1598 Irish rebellion, occurred. The country had long been a problem for Tudor England, which had attempted to impose English values and had seen the Irish as tenants on English territory. Now, with a Spanish-backed uprising, Elizabeth needed to take decisive action.

She sent her army at the start of 1599, led by Essex, who was looking to prove himself once more. He was a disaster. Rather than confronting Tyrone on the battlefield, he met him in secret and returned to England having made a treaty without the queen's authority.

When Essex thought Cecil was plotting against him, he rushed to plead his case. Assuming he was still the queen's favourite, he burst into her bedchamber while she was preparing for the day. He had seen Elizabeth without her make-up and regal dressing; not as a queen but as an old woman. She could not afford to be seen like this. The queen dismissed him before summoning him later to confront him with his failures and strip him of power. Rather than accepting his fate, Essex attempted rebellion. He assumed Londoners would back the popular war hero, but Elizabeth proclaimed him a traitor and sent her troops to meet him. The rebellion was a failure and Essex was executed as a traitor.

Although the later years of Elizabeth's reign were far from golden, she could still rally her people when needed. The war in Ireland was expensive and unsuccessful, while overcrowding and failed harvests caused agitation. When Parliament publicly condemned her for granting monopolies to her favourite courtiers, which had led to price-fixing, Elizabeth was forced to address them in 1601. She agreed to put a stop to the monopolies and she reaffirmed her love for England. She won over Parliament, there was a good harvest, and a truce was reached in Ireland and Spain. "Elizabeth, old and ill, did lose some of her former grip, but never entirely," states de Lisle. "She had followed Mary I's example in wooing the common people from the beginning of her reign, and they continued to support her."

Having seen off another uprising, the 50-year-old monarch's health was failing and after an all-too-rare period of good health, Elizabeth grew sickly. She was desperately frustrated by Cecil's growing

> "She wooed her people with smiles, words of love and great showmanship, and so won their hearts"

Did peace reign in England?

The early years of Elizabeth's reign were extremely unstable. The Catholics regarded her as a heretical bastard without a just claim to the throne, and she had to prove to her people that she was capable of ruling alone. Conspiracies at home and abroad plotted to remove her from the throne, and when Mary, Queen of Scots took refuge in England, her Catholic enemies finally had someone to rally around. 1569 saw her face the first real uprising with the Northern Rebellion. The Earls of Westmorland and Northumberland rallied the rebel aristocracy around them, but they were not prepared for the force of her reprisal.

In her later years she saw rebellion rear its head again as Essex overstepped his bounds. With famine and overcrowded of cities, Elizabeth's position became unstable once again. "Imagine if Elizabeth had died in October 1562 when she had smallpox," asks de Lisle: "Elizabeth had been on the throne almost four years: only a year short of her sister's reign. If she died, as many feared she would, how would her reign have been remembered? Elizabeth's religious settlement was not viewed as settled by anyone save the Queen. One of her own bishops called it 'a leaden mediocrity'. In military matters, while Mary I's loss of Calais is still remembered, Elizabeth's failed efforts to recover Calais by taking Le Havre and using it as a bargaining tool are completely forgotten. The campaign had ended that August 1562, with the huge loss of 2,000 men."

Verdict

Elizabeth's reign featured numerous rebellions and uprisings, but this was not unusual for a Tudor monarch, and given the religious uncertainty in the country at the time, she handled the uprisings quickly and decisively.

Rebellions against Elizabeth

When Elizabeth ascended to the throne she immediately faced the threat of rebellion from the Catholic nobility, who resented the fact that she was turning away from the changes made by her sister Mary. The first great uprising came in 1569, when the northern noblemen took advantage of the return of Mary, Queen of Scots to England, and attempted to overthrow her. The Duke of Norfolk, unhappy with being sidelined by the Earl of Dudley, entertained a marriage plot with Mary, while the northern Earls mounted rebellion. It was summarily crushed and hundreds were executed.

The Earl of Essex, Elizabeth's great favourite, attempted a rebellion in 1601 after he was stripped of his powers in an attempt to gain power. In line with his apparently oversized ego, he overestimated his personal popularity, the people's dissatisfaction with their monarch and his Queen's capacity for forgiveness for one of her former favourites. When Elizabeth was confronted with open defiance she rarely hesitated to crush it. She understood when to be brutal and when to charm. With the rebellions against her she was unforgiving and generally unsparing, meting out punishments swiftly and unsparingly to rebels and traitors.

Elizabeth's golden moments

1. 1559
Elizabeth is crowned Queen of England. Everyone watches to see if she displays a Protestant leaning but the ceremony is ambiguous.

2. 1566
Elizabeth announces to a Parliament desperate to see her choose a husband that she is married to England.

3. 1569
The Northern Rebellion is crushed. Elizabeth brutally punishes those responsible and sends a shocking reminder to anyone who would challenge her.

4. 1577
Francis Drake circumnavigates the globe and returns with boats filled with riches stolen from the King of Spain.

5. 1587
Elizabeth is forced to execute Mary, Queen of Scots, which is the final straw for Catholic Spain.

6. 1588
The Spanish Armada sails for England, but is decisively defeated. Elizabeth delivers her famous Tilbury speech from horseback, which becomes legend.

7. 1601
Following famine and controversy over her granting monopolies to her favourites, Elizabeth gives her 'Golden Speech' to a furious Parliament and wins them over.

1550 1555 1560 1565 1570 1575 1580 1585 1590 1595 1600 1605

© Joe Cummings; Mary Evans; Look and Learn; Alamy

The deathbed of Queen Elizabeth in 1603

power over her and refused to go to bed as she realised that the end was coming soon. Elizabeth finally died on 23 March 1603. Although she had struggled to change with the times in the face of younger, ambitious advisors, she had been a formidable political operator. She had still shown the cunning and cleverness to understand her situation, and had never lost the image of a queen loved by her people.

"That image was not created for her," explains de Lisle. "Elizabeth never forgot the events of 1553 when the ordinary people had backed the Tudor sisters, while the political elite had supported Jane Grey. Nor did she forget how in 1554, Mary had made a speech at the Guildhall that roused London in her defence against the Wyatt rebellion. Mary had spoken of her marriage to her kingdom, describing her coronation ring as a wedding band, and her love of her subjects as that of a mother for her children. These were the phrases and motifs Elizabeth would use repeatedly and would become absolutely central to her reign.

In addition, Elizabeth also had an instinct for the crowd's demands. Even her enemies would admit she had 'the power of enchantment'. She wooed her people with smiles, words of love and great showmanship, and so won their hearts. Elizabeth's people would never forget her. When she died and James I become king, people hugely missed the Tudor theatre of reciprocal love, of which Elizabeth had been the last and brightest star."

Elizabeth's reign was not the golden age that legend so often depicts; she faced serious uprisings, both internal and external, during her reign. She was capable of heartlessness and ruthlessness, and could be indecisive and impetuous. During the course of her rule, England saw famine, rebellion and war. However, there's no mistaking her dedication to her country and her determination to listen to what the people wanted from her – and then give it to them. She walked a political tightrope for most of her life, and the fact that she died peacefully in her bed as queen was a major triumph in itself. The English people loved her, and she, in turn, loved them. In the hearts and minds of many of her subjects, she was – and will always be – Britain's golden monarch.

1555 – 1605

Naresuan the Great

A national hero in his native Thailand, Naresuan the Great defied Burma and conquered much of Southeast Asia in the 16th century

It says something that the 2007 film *The Legend Of King Naresuan* is the most expensive film in the history of Thailand. The action-packed, five-part historical epic, which celebrates the larger-than-life conquests of Somdet Phra Naresuan Maharat – otherwise known as Naresuan the Great – cost £13.2 million ($21.7 million) to produce. With financial backing from the Thai royal family, the film chronicled how Naresuan, a 16th century warrior king, threw off the shackles of Burmese rule and established the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya as political and military force in Southeast Asia. Imagine George Washington if the American general ditched his horse for a battle elephant.

To understand the importance of Naresuan to Thai history, you first need to understand the political dynamics of 16th century Southeast Asia. First of all, the country we know as Thailand didn't exist until the 20th century. For hundreds of years, the region was ruled by a series of Thai kingdoms known in the West as Siam. In 1555, Naresuan was born to King Maha Thammarachathirat, ruler of Ayutthaya, the dominant Thai kingdom of the age.

Naresuan's father ruled a kingdom literally surrounded by enemies: Burma to the north-east, Cambodia and the Khmer to the south-east, and disparate tribal states (Shan, Mon and others) to the west and north. Burma was by far the most potent threat. In 1548, Naresuan's father repelled a formidable Burmese attack, but the Burmese King Bayinnaung returned with an even larger force – including hundreds of Portuguese mercenaries – and Ayutthaya surrendered.

The Thai kingdom was now under Burmese control. King Bayinnaung allowed Naresuan's father to remain on the throne as a puppet vassal to Burma. As a pledge of his allegiance, the Thai leader was forced to send his two sons – Naresuan, age nine, and his younger brother, Ekathotsarot – to be raised in the Burmese capital of Pegu.

> Much like the vast majority of ancient and modern Thai people, Naresuan was a practising Theravada Buddhist

For seven years, Naresuan and his brother lived in the Burmese court while his father reigned over a neutered state. Because the Burmese restricted the Thai kingdom to a small military force, Ayutthaya fell victim to a string of crippling attacks from the Khmer in Cambodia. Meanwhile, Naresuan became a student of Buddhist philosophy and ethics, as well as an avid pupil of Burmese and Portuguese military tactics and hand-to-hand combat. One of his childhood sparring partners was Minchit Sra, grandson to the Burmese king, who would grow up to face Naresuan in the most famous duel in Thai history.

When Naresuan turned 16, King Bayinnaung of Burma allowed the Thai prince to return home in exchange for his sister's hand in marriage. Young Naresuan was put in charge of the northern Thai city of Phitsanulok as the Uparat, or presumptive heir to the Thai throne. As you can imagine,

NARESUAN

Siam, 1555 – 1605

Brief Bio

This action-hero king rose from the position of a hostage at a rival court to reclaiming the throne that was rightfully his, in the process becoming a national hero. Siam, now Thailand, is still gripped by his powerful legacy. He returned home-rule to the nation as well as being the warrior-king that storytellers dream of.

"When Naresuan turned 16, King Bayinnaung of Burma allowed the Thai prince to return home in exchange for his sister's hand in marriage"

The Elephant Duel of Nong Sarai

An hour-and-a-half's drive outside of Bangkok is the province of Suphan Buri, home to one of the most popular tourist attractions in Thailand, a towering statue of a battle elephant bearing King Naresuan. The monument is believed to have been built over the exact site of the battlefield of Nong Sarai, where Naresuan fought the most famous duel in Thai history.

The year was 1593 and the Burmese army, under the direction of King Nanda Bayin's son, crown prince Minchit Sra, was marching toward the Thai capital of Ayutthaya. Naresuan and his troops marched west from Ayutthaya and met Minchit Sra's forces outside the small village of Nong Sarai. As the armies of thousands clashed, Naresuan's battle elephant panicked and ran into the middle of the fray. Naresuan spotted Minchit Sra on his own elephant and famously challenged the crown prince to a duel. "Let us fight the elephant battle for the honour of our kingdoms!" Legend has it that the two armies paused their fighting and circled around the two elephants and their royal riders. The duel lasted only a few minutes, but is recorded in dozens of paintings and even re-enacted in Thai action movies. As the two elephants converged, Minchit Sra slashed at Naresuan with his long-handled war scythe, but only nicked the king's hat. When Minchit Sra extended his scythe, he left his body exposed, giving Naresuan just enough room to deliver the fatal blow. Their prince killed, the Burmese army scattered.

Naresuan was in an unusual political position. Raised in Burma as a prisoner-prince, he both resented and respected the Thai people's feudal overlords. If he had early dreams of rebellion he hid them well, biding his time and pledging his continued loyalty to the Burmese throne.

Ironically, it was during a show of this loyalty that Naresuan aroused the deadly jealousy of Burma's new king, Nanda Bayin, who succeeded his father in 1581. Naresuan was sent by his father to pay homage to Nanda Bayin and express the Thai kingdom's unwavering allegiance to Burma. To test this allegiance, Nanda Bayin recruited Naresuan and his Thai army to help quash a rebellion in the Shan states to the north. When Nanda Bayin and his Burmese troops failed to take a key city, Naresuan swept in to conquer it. Instead of encouraging Nanda Bayin, the act embarrassed and enraged him. The ensuing decades of war between Burma and the Thai kingdom were as much personal as political – the anger of a native Burmese king against an adoptive and rebellious prince.

In 1990, a college in Phitsanulok was renamed Naresuan University to celebrate his ascension to the throne

Naresuan returned to his home base of Phitsanulok, but he was quickly summoned by Nanda Bayin to help to help put down yet another rebellion. Dutifully, Naresuan assembled his troops, but not without his suspicions. Word had reached him that the Burmese were constructing a road to the Thai capital city of Ayutthaya, a sign that the foreign king was looking to further tighten his grip on the Thai kingdom. As Naresuan marched toward the Burmese capital of Pegu, he was intercepted by two Mon princes, childhood friends from his days in the Burmese court. They warned him of Nanda Bayin's secret plan to ambush and kill Naresuan.

Naresuan had played the loyal puppet for long enough; the time had come to become the leader that his people needed. Naresuan publicly renounced his allegiance to Burma in 1584, and with his army at his back – plus the respective armies of the two Mon princes – he marched on the Burmese stronghold of Pegu, determined to win his people's independence.

The Thai offensive was repelled by Minchit Sra, Naresuan's childhood sparring partner and son of King Nanda Bayin. As Naresuan and his army fled over the Sitang River, Naresuan turned his battle elephant to face the attacking army. Legend has it that Naresuan asked for a Portuguese musket, a weapon useful for raining a volley of musket balls on an enemy, not sharpshooting an individual target. Nevertheless, Naresuan raised the musket, took aim at the Burmese general leading the charge, and shot a single ball across the Sitang River, striking the general dead. The fabled 'Royal Shot Across the Sitang River' gave the Thai army a chance to retreat back to the capital city of Ayutthaya and prepare for all-out war.

In the late 16th century, Ayutthaya was one of the biggest and most culturally and technologically advanced cities in the world. It was the Venice of the East, a walled city of intersecting canals that floated as a fortified 'island' in between three converging rivers. Its walls and rivers defended Ayutthaya against attack while its interior culture flourished, producing remarkable Buddhist-themed architecture borrowed from the ancient temples of Angkor in Cambodia, as well as art and music influenced by both East and West. Fertile rice fields surrounded the city and Ayutthaya grew rich exporting rice to European traders and to China, the reigning superpower of the region.

When Naresuan arrived in Ayutthaya, his father the king entrusted him with the city's protection and with building an army ready to answer the full strength and anger of the Burmese. Naresuan capitalised on widespread disaffection with

Defining moment

Exile in Burma
1564-1571

After the Burmese conquered the Thai kingdom, they placed Naresuan's father as a vassal over Ayutthaya and took Naresuan and his brother as hostages. Many legends surround the seven years Naresuan lived among the Burmese royal court in Pegu. There's much talk of martial arts training and a budding rivalry between Naresuan and the king's grandson Minchit Sra, but that might be nothing more than a convenient backstory for their fateful duel decades later. Some accounts say that young Naresuan grew to love King Bayinnaung like a second father, adding to the sting of the betrayal by Bayinnaung's successor Nanda Bayin.

Timeline

1555
Noble Birth
Naresuan was born Prince Naret. Royalty came through his mother, the queen, although his father was a high-ranking nobleman of Sukhothai heritage. Expectations were high for their first-born son.
1555

Declaration of Independence
When the Burmese plot to assassinate Naresuan was exposed, the Thai prince had no further reason to feign loyalty to Nanda Bayin. He performed a ceremony formally declaring an end to the Burmese tributary and, informally, declaring war on Burma.
1584

Naresuan the King
Although Naresuan's father was king of Ayutthaya, he was viewed by many as a traitor, nothing more than a puppet for the Burmese. Naresuan, on the other hand, assumed the throne as a proven military leader and political revolutionary.
1590

"Naresuan had played the puppet for long enough; the time had come to become the leader that his people needed"

Burmese bullying in the region, recruiting troops from the Shan and Mon states to reinforce the Thai ranks. King Nanda Bayin of Burma wasted no time answering Naresuan's rebellion. He sent his army against Ayutthaya less than a year after Naresuan's failed invasion of Pegu. Naresuan repelled the first attack easily, as with a second and third Burmese attempt in the years that followed. Even the Khmer tried their luck, hoping to capitalise on Thai entanglements with Burma. Incredibly, Naresuan not only held off the Cambodian offensive, but pursued his attackers all the way back to the walls of Lovek, the Khmer capital.

In 1590, King Maha Thammarachathirat died, making Naresuan the sovereign ruler of Ayutthaya. Naresuan devoted some of his energy to centralising political power and reforming the traditional patronage system enjoyed by princes. He also sidelined as a diplomat and ambassador, signing trade agreements with the Portuguese and Spanish. But Naresuan's greatest talents were as a savvy military strategist and cunning warrior.

Naresuan's greatest moment came during the fifth attempt by the Burmese army to crush the rebellious Ayutthaya state. Thai spies sent word that Nanda Bayin's army was one the move yet again, lead by Naresuan's old foe Minchit Sra. Rather than hunker down behind the city walls, Naresuan marched his army westward to intercept Minchit Sra as his forces descended from Three Pagodas Pass. The two armies met near the small village of Nong Sarai and engaged in a bloody and drawn out battle that initially favoured the Burmese. The tide turned when Naresuan, mounted on his battle elephant, personally challenged Minchit Sra to a duel for the honour of their kingdoms. The two men faced off atop their elephants, armed with razor-sharp war scythes and surrounded by their battle-weary armies. Dodging an errant joust by Minchit Sra, Naresuan quickly dispatched his childhood rival with a mortal slash. In the ensuing chaos, the Burmese fled in retreat, but the Thai army pursued them, inflicting massive casualties.

Naresuan was close with his brother Ekathotsarot. Naresuan, the first-born, was known as the Black Prince

The battle proved a critical turning point in the Burmese-Thai conflict. After his victory at Nong Sarai, Naresuan sent generals to take port cities in the coastal Burmese region of Tenasserim, winning unrestricted military and trade access to the Indian Ocean. Emboldened, Naresuan invaded Cambodia, toppling the Khmer king and returning to Ayutthaya with thousands of prisoners of war to repopulate Northern Thailand. Before his death in 1605 from a skin infection, Naresuan led military campaigns deep into a greatly weakened Burma, through the now-ruined capital of Pegu and north to Toungoo.

Naresuan was only 49 when he died, but his heroics on the battlefield cemented the Thai kingdom as the undisputed power in Southeast Asia for the next century. The legend of Naresuan the Great is more than a great action-movie plot; it's the story of a people's first taste of freedom and power in the modern age.

Defining moment

Chinese Chess
1592

The Ming Dynasty was the superpower of 16th century Asia, and Naresuan courted a favourable relationship with the Chinese. The island kingdom of Japan, however, had its sights set on greatness. In 1592, Japanese naval forces sailed to the Korean peninsula and conquered it. But Korea was just a stepping stone on the way to toppling the Ming Dynasty. Naresuan received word of clashes between Japanese and Chinese forces and sent an emissary to the Forbidden City in Beijing offering Thai military support. He likely knew that the offer would be refused – which it was – but it was a strategic show of loyalty, one that would assure China's protection of lucrative Thai trade routes.

Life in the time of Naresuan

East Meets West
Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama, one of the most successful explorers of the Age of Discovery, became the first European to sail a sea route to India in 1498, landing in Calicut. Successions of Portuguese armadas established a lucrative spice route and a colony in India. Naresuan wisely nurtured healthy trade relations with Portugal as well as the Spanish Philippines to the benefit of his own nation and its peoples.

Crown of Thai Civilisation
The city of Ayutthaya flourished from the 14th-18th century and at its height was one of the world's largest and most technologically advanced cities with a population far greater then any other metropolis of its age. The island city was protected by three rivers and saved from floods with a remarkably innovative hydraulic system.

Ayutthaya Architecture
When the Burmese sacked and burned Ayutthaya in 1767 during the Burmese–Siamese War which started in 1765, they left only the ruins of a few Buddhist monasteries. These otherworldly stone towers and intricately carved bas relief sculptures have been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Ayutthaya historical park is the ruins of the former capital of the Kingdom of Siam.

Gun Power
The Chinese invented gunpowder in the 9th century and crafted the first crude firearms or 'hand cannons' shortly after, but it was the Portuguese musket that was widely adopted by Japanese, Korean and Southeast Asian armies in the 16th century. They became a cornerstone of the Ming army only after the Ming conquest of China, giving Ming armies a distinct advantage over their neighbours'.

Ming Superpower
The Ming Dynasty, also the Empire of the Great Ming, ruled China from 1368 to 1644 and extended its borders from Outer Mongolia to the north down to Vietnam in the south. China exuded tremendous political and military influence in the region during Naresuan's rule. At its zenith the empire's standing army exceeded one million troops.

Birth of a Nation
After his victory in the epic elephant duel at Nong Sarai, Naresuan ordered that a pagoda be built over the very spot on which the battle took place, a version of which exists today. 25 January is also celebrated as Thailand's National Armed Forces Day.
25 January 1593

Collapse of Burma
Naresuan's highest goal was to march triumphantly into Pegu and personally drag Nanda Bayin to his execution. Ultimately, he failed to take the city while the king was alive, but witnessed the dissolution of the Burmese empire after Nanda Bayin's death.
1599

1605

Death
For a decorated war hero, Naresuan eventually died a commoner's death, a victim of a deeply infected carbuncle on his face, or what might have actually been smallpox.
1605

© Jay Wong Thirasak

1566 – 1625

James I

James I, King of England and Scotland, struggled throughout his reign to create a united and prosperous realm of Great Britain under a Stuart dynasty

It was widely hoped by English courtiers that King James VI of Scotland represented a safe pair of hands for the English monarchy in 1603. Elizabeth I had died after nearly 45 years on the throne and had left no clues as to who should succeed her. As far as the English court was concerned James was the natural choice even if he was the son of that notorious Catholic, Mary Queen of Scots. Unlike his mother, he was a Protestant. He had also reigned in Scotland successfully for 36 years. Secret meetings between James and members of Elizabeth's inner circle had been conducted to see if he would be interested in the job; as far as the English were concerned, his credentials were excellent.

James' disruptive and unstable childhood had forced him to become adaptable in dangerous situations, something that served him well when he became King of England. His mother had been forced to abdicate the Scottish throne in 1567 by a Protestant uprising, after which he was placed in the charge of her enemies to be raised as a Protestant. Not long into his adult reign as King of Scotland, he was kidnapped by a group of nobles and was compelled to rule through their influence for a year. These were dangerous times for James; he had been little more than a child and at the mercy of men who wanted nothing more than to claim the power behind the throne for themselves.

After the events of the Gunpowder Plot, James became paranoid, and would, in public, wear a padded doublet as a type of armour

It was an unforgiving and impoverished life, his strict Protestant teachings made for a bland existence that consisted of rules and punishments. The sober education James received in his early years along with the impoverishment of the Scottish crown meant that when he journeyed south in 1603 he was astonished at the comparative abundance of the English realm. He quickly took to enjoying his new-found wealth by lavishing English gifts on his Scottish courtiers controversially from the English treasury.

His court became one of the most extravagant and audacious institutions in England, James did not care for studying documents or enacting laws. He'd rather go hunting, hawking or hosting his infamously drunken banquets. He was a man enjoying his new-found freedom away from the cold monotony of ruling Scotland and he did not want to make a new prison for himself by trying too hard to rule England. He left it up to his courtiers to do the day-to-day business, namely an old trusted advisor, Robert Cecil, who died nine years later from exhaustion.

James believed in the divine right of kings, that he was placed on the throne by God and it was his heavenly duty to rule

While James' new-found extravagance irritated those who paid the bills, it was instead his religious beliefs that caused the most controversy.

The sexuality of the King has long been the subject of enquiry; it is widely thought that James had relationships with men

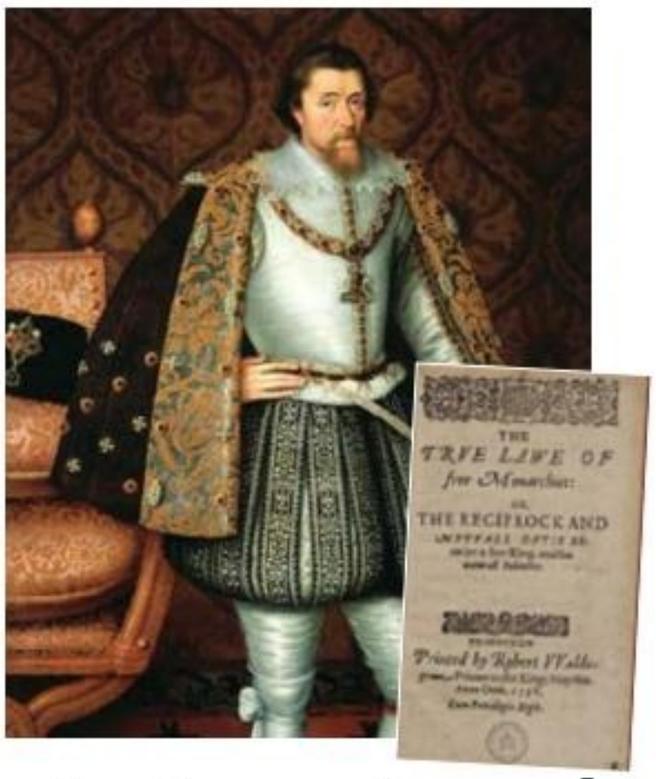
James was the first monarch who argued for a union between England and Scotland. It was rejected by both countries

JAMES I

British, 1566–1625

Brief Bio

Ascending to the throne of Scotland in 1567, James became the king of a unified Scottish and English kingdom after the death of his cousin, Elizabeth I. He struggled to continue her legacy and became increasingly unpopular with his Catholic subjects in particular, who made an attempt on his life in 1605.



The last King of Scotland

James was the last Scottish monarch to rule a fully independent Scotland without governing by proxy from other kingdoms. A Scottish King needed to be strong-willed and able to adapt quickly especially when dealing with the touchy and volatile clan system. James proved himself to be an able negotiator and a strong leader in this regard; he stopped the country tearing itself apart with religious violence and gained universal respect from the numerous clan-based factions within the Scottish court. Perhaps his greatest achievement was the book he authored called *The True Law of Free Monarchies*. In it he outlined a theory of absolute monarchy by which the King, granted his prerogative powers from God, could create laws and enact commands without consulting privy counsellors or Parliaments. This was a radical and explosive idea in the British Isles, where the power of Parliament governing in partnership with the monarchy was a long-respected institution. In Scotland the Parliamentary system was easier to manage because it was smaller and relied on business being conducted personally with the King. When James journeyed south to claim his English throne he quickly found that the English Parliament was not only far larger but also more vocal in its criticism of the monarch.

On 5 November 1605, a group of conspirators connected to the Catholic Jesuit community in England acted on a plot to assassinate James by attempting to blow up Parliament. The conspirators were appalled at James' overtly Protestant beliefs, so they decided to kill him in order to install his nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth as Queen in the hopes that she would become a pro-Catholic monarch. The plan on the face of it made sense: rather than just kill James they planned to kill his entire Protestant party at the opening of Parliament and thus create enough chaos for a pro-Catholic monarch to be installed in its wake. James was not in the Parliament building when a suspicious attendant discovered Guy Fawkes guarding barrels of gunpowder in the cellars.

When news of the conspiracy reached James, he acted decisively. He was no stranger to intrigue of this kind and knew what had to be done. He ordered Fawkes to be interrogated using the 'gentler tortures' which included racking, where Fawkes was tied to a device and stretched until his bones were forced out of their sockets. In keeping with his style of dealing with matters on a personal level, he journeyed down to the tower and interrogated Fawkes himself, asking him how he could conspire 'such a hideous a treason'. Fawkes replied: 'A dangerous disease required a desperate remedy.' James was appalled but he admired Fawkes' spirit, noting later that he put on a 'Roman resolution.' Eventually the King's torturers broke Fawkes: he gave up his fellow conspirators and they all suffered a traitor's death. While James had not been physically harmed during the whole affair, mentally it affected him greatly. He had always known that he'd had English enemies and now some of them had tried to kill him. From then on he didn't travel without guards, he wore an extra-thick doublet and carried a knife at all times for additional protection.

> James suffered from weak knees and later developed crippling arthritis in his knee joints; he was seen hobbling in later years

Four days after the Gunpowder Plot on 9 November, James addressed the first session of Parliament with the following preamble, "it may well be called a roaring, nay a firing sin from fire and brimstone, from the which God hath so miraculously delivered as all." The sitting MPs heartily agreed. Unfortunately for James it would be about the only thing him and his Parliament would agree on for the next 20 years. They argued incessantly over money, religion and taxation. James was furious. It was his view that a monarch be unquestioned by their subjects, that ruling was his business and not theirs. After a particularly difficult session, he commented, "I will not thank where I feel no thanks due... I am not of such a stock as to praise fools... I wish you would make use of your liberty with more modesty in times to come."

Parliament held on to its liberty and refused James' proposal for a standard lump sum of money to be given to him to run the country, known as the 'Great Contract' of 1610. The MPs felt James simply couldn't be trusted with such a lucrative proposition. James blamed the insolence of the members of the house and listened to his favourites in court who sneered at what they saw as common

Defining moment

Crowned King of England
25 July 1603

James had ruled Scotland as the sixth king of his name for 36 years when his cousin Elizabeth I died. Despite the family tension between the houses of Tudor and Stuart, he was the closest living relative of the unmarried, childless queen and became, by default, her heir. Ascending to the Scottish throne as a child, he becomes somewhat of a puppet prince for the Protestant nobles who support his rule. They ensure that he too adopts the Protestant faith, and this is a factor in his claim to the throne of England when Elizabeth dies. He becomes England's first King James at the age of 37.

Timeline

1566

Birth of James
James is born to Mary Queen of Scots on 19 June 1566. James is Mary's only son and while this secures the line of succession, his mother is deeply unpopular in Scotland.
19 June 1566

Flight of Mary Queen of Scots
After facing a Protestant uprising from her nobles, Mary is forced to abdicate and flees south into England leaving the young James at the mercy of her enemies.
24 July 1567

Crowned King of Scotland
The nobles ensure that James is crowned King of Scotland while he is still in his minority so they can influence his upbringing and stop him from becoming a Catholic like his mother.
29 July 1567

Marriage to Anne of Denmark
James marries Anne of Denmark by proxy to strengthen the ties of Protestant monarchies within Europe. The couple would go on to have seven children.
August 1589

Journey south
After the death of Elizabeth I it is decided that James has the strongest claim to the throne of England and is invited south. He takes his household and courtiers with him.
5 April 1603

upstarts impoverishing the crown. In the end he refused to call another Parliament for four years, only trying again in 1614 but ending with the same unhappy results. With no Parliament, there was no money, and James could not champion the Protestant cause abroad nor could he put his mind to building his kingdom at home. Deeply resentful, he retired to his court, allowed his ministers to run the country and became increasingly distracted with his own personal life.

James' sexuality had always been a subject of court gossip, but by 1620 it was actively destroying the trust between him and his courtiers. It was widely believed by the men closest to James that patronage and influence could only be obtained if you were male and the King took an interest in you. The situation was inflamed by men like George Villiers, the Earl of Buckingham, who was rumoured to be in a sexual relationship with the King. A handsome man from minor gentry, Villiers had risen from a knight of a small county to the second most powerful man in the Kingdom thanks to James, who once commented, '[I] confess to loving those dear to me... I love the Earl of Buckingham more than anyone else... Christ had his John and I have my George.' Whether sexual in nature or not, their relationship grew over the years; James called himself George's 'sweet husband' and George was James' 'wife', among other pet names. As James' marriage to Anne of Denmark resulted in seven children, the question of whether James was openly attracted to men as well as/instead of women is still a matter of debate.

The problem by 1620, at the age of 53, was that he had allowed the men he associated with to cloud his judgement. The astute negotiating skills he possessed in Scotland had abandoned him and he was now surrounded by less competent men like Villiers who gave poor advice to the aging King. It was this poor advice that made James continue to hope for a Spanish match in the closing years of his reign. A marriage between his son, Charles, and the Spanish Infanta Maria Anna would be a prestigious prize for James, so in 1623 Charles and Villiers boarded a ship bound for the Spanish mainland with James' blessing so Charles could attempt to woo the Infanta in person.

As soon as they stepped off the boat and introduced themselves to the Spanish court, they were arrested and held as 'guests'. James waited in England in anxious anticipation; a Spanish match would solve all of his financial troubles through the Infanta's dowry. When he received news that his favourite and his only son had been arrested by the Spanish court, he was furious. After some tentative negotiations, Charles and Villiers were released and returned to England with their tails between their legs. The Spanish had caused great offence in arresting Charles and now he was demanding war.

James had an overly large tongue, which was commented on negatively at the time by certain members of the English court

Neither James nor the country was in any state to wage a war with Spain to save Charles' honour, and with deteriorating health after a bad case of dysentery James died 27 March 1625. He passed away deeply unhappy; his dream of a united and prosperous Britain with strong foreign allies and a humble Parliament hadn't been fulfilled. He would later be known as the 'wisest fool in all of Christendom', extremely able but counselled badly. He left behind an England that had become deeply suspicious of the monarchy and its role in governing the country.

Life in the time of James I

Religious intolerance
England at the time of James' reign was deeply intolerant of the Catholic minority that existed within the Kingdom. Catholicism or 'Popery' as it was more commonly referred to was seen to be in league with the devil and many of James' subjects feared a clandestine Catholic conspiracy to take over the country.

The rights of Parliament
After the end of the Tudor dynasty, Parliament had become more powerful through its ability to grant money. Often Parliaments granting the crown money was dependent on Parliament being bought off with new laws favourable to representatives in the chamber.

The King's court
The King's court consisted of nobility and it acted as an organ of state that the King could use to govern the country. During James' reign the court became more important as he used the presence of both English and Scottish courtiers to rule both his Kingdoms.

Troubles abroad
The prejudice the Protestant population had for Catholics in England was inflamed by the hostility from Protestants from Catholic countries in Europe. England was largely untouched by fighting, but events abroad had a dramatic effect on prejudices and attitudes.

The New World
The first permanent settlements in America were established during James' reign starting with Jamestown, Virginia, founded in 1607. The allure of making a fortune in a new world free from religious persecution was an attractive prospect to many of James' subjects.

Defining moment

The Gunpowder Plot
5 November 1604

A plot to kill James while he attends the opening of Parliament is thwarted when guards search the cellars of the Parliament building and find Guy Fawkes guarding barrels of gunpowder. The plan was to ignite the gunpowder when James entered Parliament and destroy the English government. Fawkes and his fellow conspirators are all arrested, tortured and sentenced to a traitor's death. As a result of the plot, anti-Catholic violence increases throughout the country. James continues to call for religious moderation but has to allow a certain amount of anti-Catholic behaviour to stay popular with his subjects.

Defining moment

The Spanish match
March 1623

James had always dreamt of an alliance between England and the most powerful country in Europe – Spain. While the difference in religion was seen to be insurmountable, England being Protestant while Spain was Catholic, James insisted on pursing a match with his son Charles and the Spanish Infanta, Maria Anna. Charles travelled to Spain but was arrested and held temporarily in custody, with his travelling companion George Villiers.

Jamestown established
The first permanent English settlement in America is established on the coast of Virginia, the settlers name it Jamestown after the King of England and battle to keep the settlement alive.
24 May 1607

The Great Contract
A plan to get the crown out of debt through Parliament giving James an annual subsidy is overturned by the members of the house because they don't trust James with the money.
February 1610

Dissolved Parliament
After wrestling with Parliament for more money to prop up his out-of-control spending, James dissolves the house and does not call another session for four years.
31 December 1610

King James Bible
The King James Bible is published by James and his bishops to bring a universal Protestant faith to the British Isles. It is still used as the basis for global Protestantism today.
January 1611

Investigation of monopolies
In an effort to break up the monopoly of businesses that are strangling commerce in London, James calls Parliament to take action but his sour relationship with the house prevents any progress.
December 1620

1625

Death of a Stuart
James dies aged 58 after his health deteriorates. He leaves behind an uneasy and reformist England that his son Charles struggles to control.
27 March 1625

1609 – 1672

John II Casimir Vasa

How the reign of the last of the Vasas signalled the beginning of the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, one of most powerful countries of the 16th and 17th centuries

The year is 1648, and against all odds, John Casimir Vasa is about to be elected to succeed his recently deceased half-brother Władysław IV Waza to the Polish throne. After living in his brother's shadow for most of his life, John Casimir will soon become ruler of one of the largest and most populous countries of the 16th and 17th centuries, an area covering a huge 390,000 square miles: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. At the age of 39, his chance to be king had come.

> John Casimir lived in his brother's shadow for much of his life, even marrying his brother's widow in 1648

Ironically, one of the main reasons John Casimir is said to have been regarded as an unpleasant man among the Polish nobility throughout his life was his blatant disregard and contempt for Polish culture – not the ideal attitude for a noble, nevermind a future Polish king. Unlike his older half-brother Władysław IV Waza, who has historically been remembered as outgoing, friendly, humorous and optimistic; John Casimir was known for being unfriendly and secretive, dividing his time between the lavish partying that could be afforded by his rank and quieter moments of religious contemplation, something that would become increasingly important to him at several points throughout his life. Most crucially, John Casimir had a dislike for politics, which resulted in him having a weak power base and very little influence at the Polish court.

> He was obsessed with reclaiming the throne of Sweden for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Meanwhile, Władysław IV Waza became increasingly well known for his ability to charm whoever he met. He had had his own princely court from the age of ten, spoke and wrote in German, Italian and Latin, and had gained an international reputation for being a 'defender of the Christian faith' from his bravery in the many battles and campaigns he had fought seeking personal glory. When it came to being crowned king during the elections of 1632, John Casimir's much beloved brother had no serious contenders.

However, there was a darker side to the newly appointed king. Władysław was addicted to an extravagant lifestyle and known for spending more money than his royal court treasury could afford, as well as having several mistresses – even while he was married.

Władysław was also a man with a very short temper, and he was obsessed with the idea of reclaiming the Swedish throne: a title his and John Casimir's father, Sigismund III Vasa, had for seven years before being deposed by their uncle in 1599. This had resulted in a long-standing feud, with the Polish kings of the House of Vasa demanding the rights to the Swedish throne ever since – a claim which led to decades of war.

JOHN II CASIMIR VASA

Poland-Lithuania, 1609-1672

Brief Bio

As a younger sibling constantly overshadowed by his brother, John did not expect to take the throne. A distinguished soldier, he proved his worth in the Smolensk and Thirty Years' Wars. Captured and imprisoned by the French, he became a monk on his release and after a relatively brief kingship, abdicated and retired once more to a life of spiritual contemplation as an abbot.

The Queen Regent of Poland

Marie Louise Gonzaga was a unique woman in history, having been queen consort to two Polish kings throughout her life. Marie was born in France in 1611 and spent her childhood with her mother. From a young age, it was planned for her to marry Gaston d'Orléans, the third son of King Henry IV of France and his wife Marie de Medici, but Henry IV's successor, his other son Louis XIII, strongly opposed the marriage and when Marie was only 16-years-old, imprisoned her in the Vicennes fortress then later in a convent.

The first proposal that she marry the King of Poland, Władysław IV Vasa, was made in 1634, but Władysław eventually married Cecilia Renata of Austria. Then, after Cecilia Renata died in 1644, Marie Louise Gonzaga married Władysław IV by proxy only a year later, with John Casimir himself representing his brother. She was now Queen of Poland.

However, it was only three years after her first marriage that Marie Louise Gonzaga was left alone once again, this time a widow after the death of Władysław in 1648 before marrying John Casimir the following year. Amongst the Polish nobility, she was hardly more popular than her new husband. They were scandalised by her active interest in politics, even though she later played an instrumental role leading the Polish troops to repulse the Swedish army during the Deluge.

It was in war, though, that John Casimir distinguished himself. Much like his brother Władysław, who successfully defended Poland against foreign invasions during his reign, Casimir was a very talented military commander. At only 15 years old, he had taken part in the Smolensk War against Muscovy in 1633 and later even unexpectedly joined the army of the Holy Roman Empire to fight against the French during the Thirty Years War in 1635, one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in European history; all when he was initially supposed to be going on a diplomatic mission to prepare for another war in Vienna. During Casimir's years at war, the new King Władysław unsuccessfully tried to enhance his brother's influence by negotiating a marriage for Casimir to Swedish and Italian nobility, though upon John Casimir's return to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth it was clear that Casimir had other plans. He had fallen in love with Baroness Guldentern, but his hope to marry her was thwarted by his regnant brother.

The repentant Władysław then tried to reconcile with his brother by attempting to make him the sovereign of Courland instead, but this was also vetoed, this time by the Commonwealth parliament, and an angry and offended John Casimir abruptly left his hated home country once again in 1638. His voyage was to Spain, set on becoming Viceroy of Portugal. Little did he know that he would never reach his destination.

On his way to Spain, John Casimir was captured by French agents and imprisoned by order of Cardinal Richelieu until 1640, when he was freed by a diplomatic mission. His two long years as a prisoner changed his life, and Casimir, who had spent many years living lavishly at various European courts as well as leading a successful military life on the battlefield, was now set on dedicating his life to religion as a Jesuit novice.

> After imprisonment in France, he (temporarily) turned his back on royal life and became a monk

Once again, he left the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for Italy to join the Jesuits in 1643.

Though King Władysław was famously tolerant of religious differences throughout his reign despite his being a Catholic, John Casimir's decision was one Władysław was very vocally opposed to – causing a diplomatic rift between the Commonwealth and the pope.

Regardless of the opposition from the King, John Casimir continued to live his life as a Jesuit and had even become a Cardinal. Yet, only a few years after he had first started, Casimir found himself unsuited to ecclesiastical life and returned to Poland.

For King Władysław, the next few years marked the last of his life. On the 9 August 1647, his young son and only legitimate heir, then only seven years old, fell ill and died, a major blow to the king. Only a year later, while hunting in early 1648, Władysław suffered from a gallstone or kidney stone, a condition that worsened due to incorrect medication. At 2am on 20 May, the King was dead.

John II Casimir Vasa had since resigned as cardinal to stand in elections for the Polish throne, and that same year was elected to succeed his half brother. His reign would be monopolised by almost

Defining moment

Attempted betrothals
1632

Though generally disliked amongst the Polish nobility due to his open dislike of Polish Culture and politics, John Casimir had proven himself to be very talented as a military commander and had seen battlefields since he was a teenager.

With John Casimir now in his 20s, his regnant brother Władysław IV Vasa attempts to arrange marriages for John Casimir to Christina, Queen of Sweden, who was Queen regnant from 1633 to 1654. When this failed, Władysław then tried to negotiate a marriage between John Casimir and an Italian princess, which was also unsuccessful.

Defining moment

Life as a prisoner
1638

In 1636, after his brother Władysław had thwarted John Casimir's plans to marry Baroness Guldentern after falling in love with her, an angry and offended John Casimir abruptly left his hated home country once again. His voyage was to Spain, set on becoming Viceroy of Portugal. On his way to Spain, however, John Casimir was captured by French agents and imprisoned by order of Cardinal Richelieu until 1640, when he was freed by a diplomatic mission. Casimir had previously joined the army of the Holy Roman Empire to fight against the French during the Thirty Years War in 1637.

Timeline

1599

The Loss of the Swedish Throne
John II Casimir's father, Sigismund III Vasa, had succeeded his own father to the Swedish throne only to be deposed by his uncle in 1599. Ever since, he had claimed the Swedish throne as rightfully his.
1599

John Casimir is born
John II Casimir Vasa is born on 22 March 1609 to Sigismund III Vasa (1566-1632) and Constance of Austria (1588-1631). His older brother, Władysław IV Vasa, is predecessor to the throne.
1609

Joining the Jesuits
Now in his early 30s, John Casimir decides to become a Jesuit and leaves the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth again, despite vocal opposition from King Władysław.
1642

Becoming a cardinal
During the 1640s John Casimir lived in Italy where he was made a cardinal, but reportedly returned to Poland a few years later after finding himself unsuited to ecclesiastical life.
1646

constant war, and he would be the last of the Vasas in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

John Casimir soon even married his brother's widow queen Marie Louise Gonzaga, a woman he had met years before when he acted as a proxy in the place of Władysław during their wedding itself, for his brother could not be present. Casimir's reign was one filled with war, from the Russo-Polish War between 1654 and 1667 to The Swedish Deluge from 1655 to 1660, representing the climax of a series of wars that had taken place in Poland-Lithuania in the mid-17th century, which ultimately resulted in the Commonwealth losing an estimated 40 per cent of its population and arguably its status as a great power within Europe. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was also because of the once-lost Swedish throne so desperately desired by Casimir's father that the foundations of such a devastating war were ever even built. The Swedish Empire had become one of the strongest nations in the world and boasted a huge army. King John Casimir continued to be regarded as a weak, 'Jesuit' king, lacking support from the Commonwealth nobility because of his disdain for their culture; The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was already weakened, preoccupied with sustaining its other wars such as the Russo-Polish War to the east. The time was ripe to invade from the west.

Most of Poland was overrun by the Swedish army without much resistance, and the damages to Casimir's homeland were more extensive than even the destruction it later sustained during World War II. In Warsaw, the capital of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, only 2,000 people remained from a pre-war population of 20,000. In 1660, after five long years of war, John Casimir was forced to renounce his claim to the Swedish throne and acknowledge Swedish sovereignty over Livonia and the city of Riga. Then, in 1667, Casimir was dealt a final blow. His queen Marie Louise Gonzaga, who had always been an important source of support to King Casimir and a crucial individual when it had come to driving out Swedish forces during the Deluge, had just died. They left no surviving children.

Tired of external warfare and still mourning the death of his wife, John Casimir abdicated the Polish-Lithuanian throne on 16 September 1668, and returned to a society he had been a part of before he had ever become the ruler of so much: the Jesuits. After 20 years as king, he returned to France, where he took on the role of titular abbot of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris. Though his time as a monarch had been cursed by war, like King Władysław before him John Casimir had been a great patron of the arts. When he retired to France, most of his paintings went with him, and we have him to thank for the careful early conservation of works by Rembrandt, Rubens and Brueghel among many others that are still admired today. It was here, living the quiet existence of an abbot in the country that he had once been imprisoned in, that the man who was once a king spent the last years of his life in peace.

After an unhappy kingship, he abdicated and retreated into the church once more, becoming a Jesuit abbot

Life in the time of John Casimir

The Power of Poland-Lithuania

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a joint state of Poland and Lithuania that was ruled by a common monarch. It was one of the largest and most populous countries of 16th- and 17th century Europe and had a multi-ethnic population of 11 million at its peak.

The start of the decline

The reign of John Casimir was a watershed in Polish-Lithuanian history, representing the separation of a time of greatness and an era of slow decline and eventual collapse. Decades of unresolved problems, overly ambitious territorial expansion and economic decline finally caught up with the Commonwealth in the form of the Deluge.

The Great War

The Deluge saw Cossack, Russian and Swedish forces alike take swarms across the borders of Poland-Lithuania to conquer almost all the land with strikingly little resistance. King Casimir and the nobles had failed to avert these catastrophic forces, with the King's personality and policies making it difficult for many to work with him in parliament.

The Swedish throne

What became known as the Vasa King's traditional insistence on regaining the Swedish throne was one of the elements that first started the disaster. After John Casimir's father Sigismund III Vasa, was deposed from the Swedisth throne by his uncle in 1599, Sigismund spent much of the rest of his life trying to reclaim it.

Defeating armies

Despite the devastation of The Deluge, it was the strength of the Polish-Lithuanian state that allowed it to survive, defeating the Swedes and fighting both the Cossack and Russian armies to a standstill. The period of invasions and civil wars that plagued the Cossack state after it seceded from Poland-Lithuania is still known to Ukrainians as the Ruin.

Defining moment

Resigning
1647

In October 1647, John Casimir resigns as cardinal to be able to stand in elections for the Polish throne, even attempting to gain the support of the Habsburgs and marry an Austrian princess.

His brother, King Władysław, had lost his son and only legitimate heir at only seven years old, due to illness. Only a year later, while hunting in early 1648, Władysław suffered from a gallstone or kidney stone, a condition that worsened due to incorrect medication. At 2am on 20 May, the king was dead.

Forced to abdicate
The Swedes were forced to retreat. The Peace of Andrusovo in 1667 ended the war with Muscovy, but the King faced stiff internal opposition and even armed uprisings.
1667

King John
John Casimir is elected to succeed his half brother on the Polish throne, and eventually marries Władysław's widow, Marie Louise Gonzaga, a year later.
1648

Russo-Polish War
John Casimir's reign was marked by disastrous wars, first with the Cossack rebel Bohdan Khmelnytsky and then against the Cossack and Muscovite forces.
1654

The deluge
The Swedes invade, facing very little opposition. John Casimir lacks support among the Commonwealth nobility, and the ensuing invasion adds to the Commonwealth losing an estimated 40 per cent of its power.
1655

Death of Marie
The Queen, who was always a great supporter of John Casimir, dies, and the dispirited John Casimir abdicates the throne and leaves for France.
1667

Joining the Jesuits again
John Casimir dies at the age of 63, after having lived as a Jesuit and become abbot of Abbey of Sain-Germain-des-Prés in Paris since his abdication of the Polish throne.
1672

1672

©Getty

1755 – 1793

Marie Antoinette

How one woman's passion for fashion, stubbornness and extravagant spending drove her country to chaos and revolution

A single cart drawn by two huge white horses travels through the streets of Paris as a ravenous crowd fights to catch a glimpse of the woman within. Her hands are bound but her back is straight and her expression is hard and proud. Her famous blonde hair has turned a premature grey, and the figure that was once dainty and slender has grown large with rich palace meals. She sits frozen in place while the crowd spit and yell insults at her. Her name is Marie Antoinette, formerly the queen of France, and the people are screaming for her blood.

> Louis had no qualms about dining in public, but Marie loathed it, and often waited until she was in private to eat

As the cart reaches Place de la Révolution, Marie catches a glimpse of her one-time home, the grand Tuileries Palace, and her face crumbles. Sudden hot tears stream from her eyes and her body trembles. But in a moment she has recovered. She forces the tears back, veils her emotion and steps from the cart with purpose. Draped in a white cotton gown and white cap, she has been stripped of all the finery she was once renowned for, but Marie knows, even without a crown, she is still a queen; that is all she ever was. With her head held high, she moves with majesty towards the guillotine. The time is 12:15pm when she rests her neck upon the block. The blade is released, and in a moment the illustrious and terrible life of the most hated woman in France is ended.

Since her birth, Marie Antoinette had been primed and prepped to become a queen. Born the 15th child of the formidable Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa, the only woman to serve in the role, her mother was strict and distant with her youngest daughter, determined she should serve as a bridge between the two great warring dynasties of Habsburg and Bourbon. Maria was a clever woman, and she ensured that her beautiful young daughter became the talk of the French capital. The French king Louis XV was convinced, and arranged the marriage of the young archduchess to his grandson and heir, Louis XVI.

The two great leaders, concerned with cementing their individual power, had not taken into consideration the compatibility or the happiness of the children involved. The young archduchess was undoubtedly beautiful, with her slender figure and gleaming blonde hair, but she was also incredibly vivacious. Caring little for books and education, she was a thrill-seeker, and although she didn't know languages or mathematics, she knew people, and was an expert at getting them to do exactly what she wanted. The young dauphin, meanwhile, was a quiet and timid boy. Strictly religious, he read often and engaged in quiet pursuits. He loved deeply, but he feared even more so, and most

The aristocrat menu

Four soups
Rice soup, Scheiber, croutons with lettuce, croutons unis pour Madame.

Two main entrées
Rump of beef with cabbage, loin of veal on the spit.

Sixteen entrées
Spanish pâtés, grilled mutton cutlets, rabbits on the skewer, fowl wings à la Maréchale, turkey giblets in consomme, larded breasts of mutton with chicory, fried turkey à la ravigote, sweetbreads en papillot, calves' heads sauce pointue, chickens à la tartare, spitted suckling pig, Caux fowl with consomme, Rouen duckling with orange, fowl fillets en casserole with rice, cold chicken, chicken blanquette with cucumber.

Four Hors D'Oeuvres
Fillets of rabbit, breast of veal on the spit, shin of veal in consomme, cold turkey.

Six dishes of roasts
Chickens, capon fried with eggs and breadcrumbs, leveret, young turkey, partridges, rabbit.

Desserts
Apple strudel, orange-flower, rosewater and lemon meringues, macarons, jellied fruits, candied violets.

The pauper menu
Coarse stale brown bread & vegetable soup.

"Since her birth, Marie Antoinette had been primed and prepped to become a queen"

"Louis was unable to consummate the marriage for seven long years"

crucially, he was a man who could be easily convinced by loud, persuasive people – his new wife was one such person.

The moment Marie stepped through the doors of Versailles she was surrounded by courtiers far older and more experienced than her, who opposed everything she represented – an alliance between France and Austria. Marie was denied the common method any young queen would employ to solidify her position – producing an heir – as Louis was unable to consummate the marriage for seven long years. Her awkward and humiliated husband shrank smaller and smaller under the knowing smirks of the members of court, but shrinking was the last thing Marie had on her mind.

Marie dressed for success. She robed herself in a huge array of luxurious silk dresses, placed her dainty hands into scented gloves, stood strong in high heels and literally made herself taller with her towering pouf hairstyle. She broke court traditions, abandoning heavy make-up and replacing wide-hooped panniers with simple feminine dresses that complemented her full figure. Her costume was strategy for survival; it sent a loud and clear message – "I can do exactly what I please" – and this message filtered into her lifestyle. As her husband slept, she partied into the early hours, gossiping with friends and attending masked balls. She commissioned a painting of herself riding in the style of a man and she even dared to own a property independently of her husband. The young Austrian was making waves; if tradition wouldn't accept her, then she would smash it to pieces.

The older generation at court didn't like this one bit – a frivolous, air-headed girl they could handle, but an ambitious and stubborn foreign woman who didn't know her place? That was far more dangerous. Before she had even finished her teens Marie was making enemies. What was originally the gossip of court filtered outside the palace walls and filled the pages of the libelles, the slanderous pamphlets published across France. To the writers and readers of these, the lack of an heir obviously meant that the queen was courting other men, and her excessive wardrobe came across as grandiose at a time when her people were starving. The revolutionary propaganda that was already bubbling leapt upon this image of an idiotic, shameless queen and refused to let it go. Little did Marie know, while she focused on cementing her place as queen, the destruction of the royal authority had already begun, and she was to serve as the centrepiece.

> The queen, eternally modest and had a special bath robe made for her so that she could bathe fully clothed

After the royal couple were finally able to produce an heir, the queen transformed from a party girl to a stern, self-controlled woman. But this change came too late; the revolution gaining speed outside the palace walls had already decided exactly what sort of person she was. The country was in debt, huge debt, and it was the common people who were feeling the sting. Marie, deemed responsible thanks to her trivial expenditures, was dubbed 'Madame Déficit'. This was not without truth – Marie spent more than any other person in France, bestowing her favourites with gifts and reluctant to tax her aristocrat chums. The expenses of court were huge, and outside of Versailles the people were starving.

But Marie was fighting her own battles. Her husband, after suffering from bouts of depression, had withdrawn his power in government and she was the only one able to cement the authority of monarchy in his place. Despite her own mother's advice to avoid meddling in politics, the queen emerged as a powerful political force, and without the support of her husband was forced to grapple for the power of the monarchy against an assembly growing less and less faithful.

On the surface she was iron, but underneath Marie was shaken by the uprising outside the palace walls. She had made hasty efforts to

As revolution washed over France, the people called for Marie's blood

A queen's favourite things

The extravagant purchases that drove a nation to loathing

Wardrobe

Cost: 258,000 livres a year

Officially, Marie had a fixed allowance of 120,000 livres for clothes and accessories. However, she often exceeded this quite considerably. Although she was supposed to restrict her orders to 36 dresses for summer and another 36 for winter, for the fashionable queen this simply wasn't enough. Combined with the 18 pairs of gloves and four pairs of shoes ordered for her on a weekly basis, Marie's wardrobe filled three separate rooms at Versailles.

Hameau de la Reine

Cost: 500,000 livres

Marie, constantly surrounded by the rigid structure and responsibility of court life, ordered the construction of this hamlet as a place of escape. Hameau de la Reine was a working farm designed in rustic, pastoral style. There, Marie, her children and friends would dress up as simple peasants, milk the cows and sheep and enjoy the simplicity of the fantasy retreat, while outside the starving and struggles of real French peasants continued.

Château de Saint-Cloud

Cost: 6-10 million livres

After falling pregnant again in 1784, Marie convinced the king to purchase this extravagant palace for her on the premise that the air of the commune would be beneficial to her children. As well as the substantial 6 million livres price tag, Marie poured money into redecorating and rebuilding parts of the building and gardens. The French people were shocked, not only at the irresponsible spending but also at the prospect of a queen independently owning her own residence.

Good deeds

The kind acts that the libelles tried to hide

Housing the homeless

Although the construction of Hameau de la Reine was criticised as the queen playing at being a peasant while her people suffered, she allowed several peasant families to live at the site, building cottages specifically for them. Peasants also maintained the farm and its output.

The beloved couple

When Marie and Louis were married in 1774, many people were killed in a stampede during the celebratory firework display. The newlyweds donated all their private spending money for a year to the suffering victims and families. Marie was well liked at this time.

A sympathetic queen

It is very unlikely that Marie uttered the infamous phrase "let them eat cake," in reference to the bread shortages. Her actual recorded words when hearing about the famine were far more sympathetic: "It is quite certain that in seeing the people who treat us so well despite their own misfortune, we are more obliged than ever to work hard for their happiness."

Charitable monarch

The queen and her husband both supported a number of charitable causes. Louis XVI founded the Maison Philanthropique and Marie became a patron of a society that helped the elderly, blind and widowed. She also started a home for unwed mothers.

Sacrifice for the nation

Marie did more than simply pity the suffering peasants. During the famine of 1787-88, her family sold a lot of their flatware to buy grain for the poor. Every Sunday Marie would take a collection for them from the rich of Versailles, and when her people were starving she ate cheap barley bread so more money could be donated.

When Louis XVI ascended the throne aged just 19, the country was already in huge debt

reduce her expenditure, stripping her room of her fineries, but these efforts went largely ignored. When she emerged in her box at the theatre, she was hissed at so horrifically by the crowd that she began to completely withdraw from the woman she once was. She stayed away from parties, from balls, even from the king's council chamber, and devoted her attention to her children, terrified that if she involved herself further, she would be held responsible for tearing France in two.

On 4 June 1789, tragedy struck. The dauphin, Marie's eldest son and all-important heir to the throne, died. The royal couple were overcome with grief for the child they had anticipated for so long, but the people were not. The death, usually cause for national mourning, was ignored by the people desperate to end the famine that was killing their own children. Marie was outraged, and when demand after demand poured through for reform, she urged the king to remain strong against them. For a woman who believed in the absolute power of monarchy, who had spent all her childhood and adult life in palaces, the revolution opposed and offended everything she believed in and had worked for. Now she was ready to use force to get the rebellious masses to understand.

The queen did not understand for one moment the justifications or hopes that underpinned the revolution. All that she witnessed was the brutality and murderous tactics of its leaders, and she wanted to blast every trace of it from existence. What the queen saw was not liberty, but rebellion and chaos.

> Marie's extravagant and luxurious dresses had fitting names, such as 'Heart's Agitation' and 'Stifled Sighs'

The queen decided that the revolution must be crushed with mercenary Germanic troops. She believed, deep down, that the people were good natured and would respect the authority of the monarchy when faced with force. But she was wrong. As news of an armed attack swept through Paris, the revolutionaries took their cause a step further, stormed the Bastille and turned the streets red with blood.

As royalists fled Paris for their lives, the woman most at risk remained with her husband and was forced to stand by as his power was signed away to the National Assembly that was now ruling Paris. But this was not enough for the outraged population. The king had hoped that by agreeing to demands and staying at the palace in Versailles he could keep a low profile until the revolution died down, but on 5 October a mob of outraged women marched from Paris to Versailles. They had one aim in mind, and navigated their way through the palace to Marie's private suite. Fuelled by revolutionary passion, they cut down their foes and sacrificed their own lives to confront Madame Déficit directly.

Marie had fled, barefoot and half naked, to the king's bedchamber, barely escaping with her life. The mob reformed beneath a balcony and their voices rose in unison as they demanded to see the queen. Marie, who had never bowed to anyone she deemed inferior, was humiliated, but had no choice. Taking her young son and daughter with her, she emerged, straight backed and strong against the rabble of revolution. She was not humble, not apologetic, nor begging for mercy, but had the iron will of

Marie commissioned paintings of herself and her family in simple but stately dress, in the hope it would improve her reputation

"The expenses of court were huge, and outside the people were starving"

a soldier facing a firing line. Faced with this defiant, unyielding, prideful woman, the crowd bellowed a cry she had not heard for many years: "Long live the queen!"

However, the cries of support did not continue as the royal family was transported from Versailles to their essential captivity in the Tuileries Palace in Paris. Marie sunk down as she sat in the carriage, hoping to avoid the glare and insults of the uncontrollable mob. She loathed the palace. Though it had housed royalty, she had been forced there against her will and in complete humiliation. She was furious that the entire world would now know that the divine right of kings had been challenged and, like a petulant child, refused to do anything that might improve her popularity.

For Marie, the truth was clear - the mob had won, and she refused to remain a prisoner of a force of chaos. After two painful years of her powers being sapped, Marie had had enough and focused on escaping Paris. In 1791, the royal family, disguised as common travellers, were smuggled away in a carriage. The coach travelled some 200 miles, though it was anything but subtle. The queen had refused to travel without all her comforts, and the heavy, slow carriage with its extra horses attracted attention. Their faces were among the most recognisable in the land, and the escapees were inevitably discovered. Disgraced and humiliated, they were forced to make the long journey back to Paris. Dusty, weary and aged beyond her 35 years, as Marie travelled through the crowds to her prison she was spat on, beaten and pushed by the crowds. The monarchs had chosen to abandon their people, so the people made a decision in kind - the monarchy had to go.

The queen knew it was useless to try to find sympathetic ears in France. With the revolution out of control and the hatred against her reaching fever pitch, she appealed to her powerful relations. She pushed her brother, Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II, and his son Francis II to threaten France on her behalf. But this led to France declaring war on Austria on 20 April 1792. Not only was the 'Austrian woman' hated, but now she was also an enemy. Foreign armies poured into France, threatening the people that if any harm was to come to the royal family, they would pay with their lives. But this was a crowd as unrelenting as their queen.

Scandalous headlines

The lies in the libelles were eaten up by the royalty-hating revolutionaries

The affairs of a royal tart

It has been discovered that the queen was visited by her long-time lover Count Axel von Fersen nine months before the birth of the young prince Louis Charles. Knowing of the king's past problems in the bedroom, it's highly likely that the child is a product of the licentious Antoinette's extra-marital affairs.

Filthy queen's lesbian affairs exposed

Not only has that Austrian woman been cheating with other men, but now palace sources have revealed that Antoinette also receives many female callers. The infamous English lesbian Baroness Lady Sophie Farrell of Bournemouth and Princesse de Lambelle are just two of her female lovers.

Wanton Marie's shocking tales of incest and debauchery revealed

Deplorable accusations have been put against the ex-queen, Widow Capet, at her trial. As well as the various orgies she organised in Versailles, the disgraced woman's sexual deviance apparently knows no bounds, and she is said to have sexually abused her own son, Louis Charles. She refused to respond to this charge.

The dark destinies of the children of France

After the execution of their parents, the fate of the royal children was in the hands of their captors

Louis XVII 1785-95

After the execution of his father, the royalists regarded Louis as the true king of France and hatched many plots to free him from the Temple in Paris. To prevent this, he was separated from his mother and placed under the supervision of Antoine Simon, a cobbler. Although his wife, Marie-Jeanne, treated the child with kindness, he was not raised as a prince and had his court manners drilled out of him and replaced with the language of the gutter. When the Simons left the Temple, Louis is reported to have been caged alone in a dark room, his food passed through the bars. Suffering from extreme neglect, the young boy was often abused by his jailers and refused to talk to anyone. By May 1795, he had fallen seriously ill, and he died alone on 8 June, aged ten. It was determined that the cause of death was a lymphadenitis – but this is not without controversy, as it is not usually fatal and was declared to be a long-time illness, but in fact developed very quickly. He was buried in an unmarked grave and when rumours surfaced that the body was not that of the dauphin, hundreds came forward proclaiming to be the lost prince. However, DNA testing in 2000 determined it was indeed Louis.

Marie Thérèse 1778-1851

Marie Thérèse was the only royal prisoner in the Temple to survive the Reign of Terror. She lived a life of solitude and boredom in her cell, she was denied any news of her family and was forced to listen to the cries of her young brother as he was abused. Only aware that her father was dead, she scratched the words 'Marie Thérèse Charlotte is the most unhappy person in the world' into the wall of her room. When the terror was over, she was allowed to leave the country. Aged just 16, she was taken to Vienna. She later married her cousin, Louis-Antoine, and lived in exile in Britain. She finally went back to France with the Bourbon restoration in 1814. When Napoleon returned to France in 1815, Marie attempted to rally the troops against him and refused to leave Bordeaux despite Napoleon's demands, leading him to dub her the 'only man in her family'. After the death of Louis XVIII, Marie's husband became heir to the throne, however, the July Revolution forced his abdication and Marie was exiled once again to Britain, where she died of pneumonia aged 72.

After the execution of the king, Marie became known as 'Widow Capet'

Marie refused to attempt any escape that did not also include her husband

Marie had expected life imprisonment, so her death sentence was received with much personal shock

The executioner chopped off Marie's hair to allow for a clean cut of the guillotine

Marie's actions had brought war to France, and the people brought war to her. On 10 August, an armed mob stormed into the palace, forcing the king and queen into a tiny reporter's box. Under heckles and the glare of the crowd, they stood by helplessly as the 900 Swiss guards charged with defending them were massacred. All their precious objects were gathered and piled on desks as they were forced to listen to the debates that declared a republic and ended the monarchy.

If Marie loathed her imprisonment in the Tuileries, the Temple fortress she and her family were escorted to was another hell entirely. Stripped of all the finery that had for so long defined her, Marie was treated horrifically by her jailers. As well as the constant abuse and insults, they blew smoke in her face and allowed her no privacy. Under such extreme and terrible conditions, her health deteriorated and she developed tuberculosis. But worse than illness, worse than rags, and worse than jeers, her royal name, her pride and identity had been stripped from her. Royalty no longer, the family was given the name Capet, ending the long line of monarchs that had ruled the country for more than 1,000 years.

In December, Louis, Marie's ever indecisive and conservative husband, was found guilty of high treason and sentenced to death. A month later he was executed. Although the royal couple had always been a mismatched pair, and rumours of Marie seeking comfort elsewhere may not have been entirely untrue, he had been the father of her children, her companion for more than 20 years and her only security in a time of terror, upheaval and uncertainty. There is no doubt that the execution of Louis shocked and saddened the queen to her core.

Versailles smelled awful during the era, so Marie's rooms were scented with flowers, potpourri and perfumes

She had always found comfort in her children, but in July, despite her pleas, her beloved son was taken from her, and in September she was taken from the only family she had left – her daughter and sister in law. She was condemned to a month of horrific solitary confinement in a dank underground cell in the Conciergerie. Under constant surveillance, Marie had no chance of escape, but she would not have to wait long to discover her fate.

On 14 October, Marie was taken to face her enemies at the Revolutionary Tribunal. The charges against her were more an attack on her person than her politics; the headlines that had filled the libelles were presented as fact. They accused her of organising orgies in Versailles, orchestrating the massacre of the Swiss guards, sending France's money to Austria and, most appalling of all, sexually abusing her own son. At this she refused to respond, simply uttering: "If I make no reply, it is because I cannot. I appeal to all mothers in this audience." Her unbelievable defiance and strength despite the horrors she had endured was remarkable, but the verdict had been decided before she even entered the room. Guilty.

In her execution, Marie displayed the courage of a true queen until the end. But that was the problem exactly: she was a queen in every sense of the word. She was born to be a queen, trained to be a queen, had performed her duties as queen throughout her entire life – but France didn't want a queen. Her lifeless body was dragged from the guillotine and tossed in a cart, with her head thrown between her legs. Her remains were dumped in an unmarked grave, but the memory of Marie Antoinette would live on as France's hated, but eternal, queen.

Expert opinion

Melanie Clegg is the author of five historical novels and is also a regular contributor to *Majesty* magazine and her own women's history blog *Madame Guillotine*. Her first biography, *Marie Antoinette: An Intimate History* is out now and her second biography, *A Life Of Marie De Guise*, is due to be published by Pen and Sword Books in 2016.

Was Marie really to blame for the French Revolution, or was she simply a scapegoat?

Although the image of the flaunting, extravagant queen causing the French Revolution with her careless profligacy is a potent one, the fact is that the revolution was ultimately the result of centuries of fiscal and social inequality. A series of poor harvests and the ruinously expensive involvement in the American Revolution acted as the catalyst in 1789. Marie Antoinette, the unpopular foreign queen who was commonly believed to be the power behind the throne, while at the same time in league with the Austrians, was a convenient scapegoat for all – for the aristocracy, who had no wish to lose their privileges; the middle classes, who resented the power and privilege of the upper classes; and the lower orders, who believed the scurrilous lies and exaggerations being spread by disaffected members of the aristocracy and even the royal family about the queen's personal life and spending habits.

1787 – 1828

Shaka, King of the Zulus

Through wisdom, courage and warrior strength Shaka, King of the Zulus, united the greatest African kingdom the world has ever seen

Shaka flexed his muscles and adopted a hunting posture as he looked down at the venomous snake in the long grass. The black mamba had just killed one of the prized bulls his chief and patron, Dingiswayo, had charged him to protect and now it had turned on Shaka. By allowing the snake to kill Dingiswayo's property Shaka had failed him, the man who had taken him in after he and his mother were cast out of his father's tribe; he had also brought shame on the dignity of his warriors. The snake hissed and made a warning gesture, Shaka had to best it in order to keep his place within the tribe. He was tall, fast and agile, but he knew the bite from the venomous pest would be fatal if he lost. The snake struck, Shaka side-stepped the lightning-fast strike and lunged with his spear, driving it into the snake's body. Dingiswayo had always lauded Shaka for his royal blood, it was one of the reasons he took him and his mother in when they were alone on the plains. As Shaka stood triumphant having revenged the death of the bull, he was now more than a political tool – he was a fully fledged Zulu warrior with his first kill.

Shaka was noted for his strength and agility, however he was a poor public speaker and was often tripping over his own words

The victory over the snake was the first of many conquests won by Shaka as he rose through the ranks of Zulu society. His next success came when he joined the warrior fraternity of his tribe, the Impi regiment, in 1809. He found the kinship and acceptance of the soldier group a welcome relief from the constant taunting over his status as an outcast from the other boys in Dingiswayo's tribe. The children would shout, call him names and insult his beloved mother. Now he was a man who commanded respect from the other warriors and he quickly became a popular and able leader.

Shaka's given name was actually Tshaka. Shaka literally means bastard and was used to taunt him as a child, but it stuck

His physical size and hunting ability stood him head and shoulders above the rest, but he was also known to be a man of original ideas. He found traditional forms of African combat, which often involved little more than small skirmishes with throwing spears, to be no test of a warrior's mettle. He introduced a short stabbing spear, the iklwa, and ordered them to be used in close combat with large shields in

SHAKA

Zulu Kingdom, 1787 – 1828

Brief Bio

This powerful warrior rose through tribal ranks from decidedly humble beginnings. Proving himself in combat, he began unifying the tribes of the Natal region through brutal conquests. Power rapidly went to his head, however, and the king became increasingly power-crazed as his dominance in the region grew.

Zulu warrior charging with the iconic short stabbing spear, the iklwa

Life in the time of Shaka

The white settlers

During the time of Shaka white settlers began encroaching on the lands of the Africans in increasing numbers. The African tribes were forced to flee, fight or otherwise accommodate the settlers as best they could. Some tribes, like the Zulus, initially became allies and trade partners with the invaders.

The Mfecane

The Mfecane or 'crushing' came at the end of Shaka's reign and was a direct result of his constant warfare within the Natal region. Refugees and scattered tribes were forced out of the area and into the surrounding landscape, creating widespread famine and the scramble for crop-producing land formed a crush of thousands of people.

Climate change

It is widely thought that changes in the climate in south-eastern Africa caused the largely peaceful farming tribes that lived in the region, like the Nguni who became the Zulus, to become more volatile and militaristic as available farm land shrunk due to the weather becoming much drier.

Zulu rites

Zulu society was highly ritualised and based around codes of kinship. One of these kinships came in the tribe's military system, where males as a rite of passage would become a warrior with other males the same age. When Shaka took over as king he used this custom to expand his kingdom.

An oral tradition

Much of what we know about Shaka and his early years comes from the rich Zulu oral tradition, where history was repeated in stories passed down from generation to generation through word of mouth. It was only after explorers came into contact with the Zulus that their history was written down.

Shaka's tactics

Shaka completely revolutionised the way Zulus waged war during his reign as king. Tribal conflicts would never again amount to little more than small raids for cattle or posturing to display strength. Unlike the African armies of old, Shaka's military was designed to do one thing: crush opposition and grind rival tribes into the dust. He devised a new Impi system where all males would serve him for a fixed term in his army, which by 1820 numbered nearly 40,000 men.

He introduced the iklwa, or short stabbing spear, which suited Shaka's preference for leading his warriors into hand-to-hand combat with the enemy. Close combat required a heavier shield, so he introduced the cowhide-covered Impi shield, which was used with the stabbing spear to keep the warrior alive long enough for him to deal out death on the plains. The greatest innovation brought to the Zulu military doctrine was Shaka's bull-and-horns tactic. He would order his men to close in on the enemy, which was the bull charging in, and at the last moment order troops to sweep around onto the enemy flanks, creating the horns, crushing them in a pincer. With these developments, Shaka's kingdom swept through the South African plains like wild fire, carving out the Zulu kingdom.

order to devastate the enemy's position quickly and with deadly efficiently.

Dingiswayo was impressed by these reforms and the victories Shaka stacked up during his early years as a warrior. He had found a powerful ally and had been proven correct to welcome him into his village when no one else would accept him. As a way of showing his gratitude for his service, Dingiswayo helped Shaka return to his father's tribe as chief in 1816. The men who had insisted on his banishment shortly after his birth were quickly brought to heel by Shaka's fearsome Zulu warriors. Dingiswayo restored his honour and the honour of his mother and in return Shaka offered his undying loyalty. It was this loyalty that inspired Shaka to take action when Dingiswayo was killed by tribesmen of the Ndwandwe. Shaka was compelled to take revenge on his patron's killers and he quickly combined his tribe with Dingiswayo's to create a fledgling Zulu kingdom. He then launched a campaign of conquest against the Ndwandwe and their chief, Zwide. They met in battle near the Mhlatuse River, Shaka led the charge and used his new bull-and-horns formation to completely destroy Zwide's forces. The survivors and their womenfolk were incorporated into the Zulu kingdom. In the space of three years Shaka had expanded a small village group into a nation to be feared across the continent.

Shaka was born during a period of extreme famine in the south-eastern region of South Africa

With his new army behind him and the destruction of his immediate enemies complete, Shaka set about subjugating all the peoples within the Natal region, whether they were hostile or not. He organised his new kingdom along military lines - he had no intention of being cast out again or killed through weakness, so he built up his military prowess. All men within his domain were now eligible for military service. They were organised in their Impis according to age, with the rest of the kingdom providing the war machine with food and weapons. Conscription could last years and soldiers were housed within purpose-built barracks so their king could call on them whenever he needed military muscle to satisfy his whims. The Zulu nation had become a country completely dedicated to warfare and conquest under the leadership of Shaka.

"In three years Shaka had expanded a small village group into a nation to be feared"

Defining moment

Shaka crowned King of the Zulus 1818

After Dingiswayo is captured and killed by a neighbouring tribe, the Ndwandwe under the ferocious Zwide, Shaka makes a courageous bid to unite all of the Zulus under his rule. After a number of ritual displays of courage and with the presence of his loyal warriors behind him, Shaka manages to convince Dingiswayo's tribe that a united Zulu nation would conquer all of Africa and bring Dingiswayo's killers to justice. He is crowned King of the Zulus and quickly sets about reforming the military system in preparation to confront Zwide and the Ndwandwe across the Mhlatuse River.

Timeline

1787

Birth of a warrior
Shaka is born to the Zulu chief Senzangakhona kaJama and his lover Nandi. Despite his noble birth he is rejected by his father and he and his mother flee his father's court.
1787

First kill
Shaka is charged with guarding a prized bull by Dingiswayo, his new chief. A black mamba kills the bull so Shaka attacks the poisonous snake, dodges its venomous blows and kills it.
1800

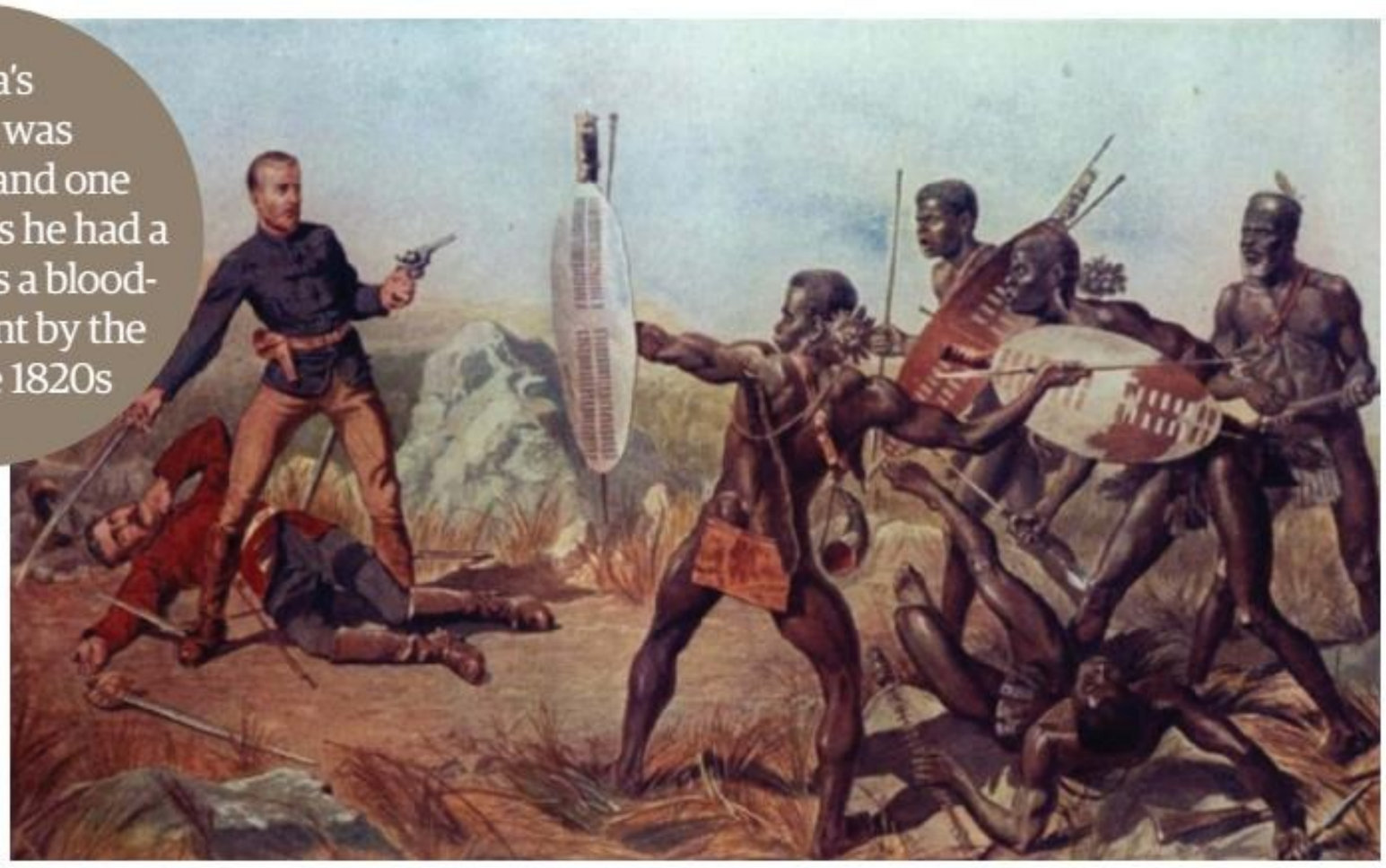
Shaka joins his Impi
Shaka approaches manhood, joins his Impi or age regiment and becomes a warrior for Dingiswayo. His large size and reputation as an uncompromising and brave warrior quickly impresses his chief.
1809

Retakes his birthright
After 26 years of exile Shaka retakes the tribe he was born into by successfully beating his illegitimate half-brothers. He uses the military muscle of Dingiswayo to do this.
1816

Victory against Zwide
Shaka uses his superior fighting ability, as well as the new skills he has taught his Zulu warriors, to completely destroy the Ndwandwe war host assembled at the Mhlatuse River and bring the killers of his great patron to justice. The battle is unlike anything fought by warriors living in the region before. Rather than a small skirmish or a non-violent gesture to prove superior fighting ability, Shaka orders an all-out attack and his Zulu warriors quickly move into close combat using the bull-and-horns tactic to slaughter Zwide's men.
1819

As a champion fighter and king to his warriors, Shaka realised he had to expand his kingdom in order to keep his prestige high among the men that he led into battle. He needed more fertile land, more cattle, more everything to satisfy his people. What's more his warriors would soon become restless if they weren't fighting anything. He decided to launch raids into the regions north of Natal, killing off rival warriors, murdering or enslaving the women and children that were left undefended. This created a mass migration of refugees out of the area and into the tribal lands in what is today central South Africa, causing famine and starvation in the wake of Shaka's conquests. He had no idea he was causing such a huge humanitarian disaster, but the consequences of his relentless pursuit of warfare is remembered as the Mfecane or 'crushing' of the African people.

Shaka's temper was legendary and one of the reasons he had a reputation as a blood-thirsty tyrant by the end of the 1820s



The mass migration of refugees and the tales of destruction they brought with them into the lands north and west of Natal did not go unnoticed by the other great power that was beginning to show dominance in the area: the British Empire. Word had spread to London of an African king with a fearsome reputation for conquest in the eastern reaches of the cape – it was said he was unbeatable in combat. The British were too weak in the area to challenge Shaka openly, so instead they sent a delegation to negotiate with him. Shaka was impressed by the men who saw him and offered generous trade agreements and peace with the British. He cared little for their firearms and technology, which he dismissed as useless against the agility and speed of the bull-and-horns formation of his Zulu warriors. He negotiated with the British on equal terms, his kingdom would need the trade and the British needed their eastern flank secured. Despite this seemingly amicable arrangement, Shaka could tell a predator when he saw one and knew the British would be back in greater numbers.

By 1827, Shaka had turned the Zulu Kingdom into one of the most powerful African dynasties in history. Yet his warriors had become weary of the constant demands for war. He had broken from tradition in making them fight hundreds of miles away from their homes and insisting that they remained celibate throughout their service in his army. He had also become ruthless in dealing with his adversaries – often a death sentence would be bestowed with a simple nod of his head while he sat on his throne. When his beloved mother died in 1827 he realised that he was now alone, he had never married and so the only thing that could hold any meaning in his life was his skill as a warrior and the kingdom he had built. He ordered his warriors to mourn his mother but when his demoralised horde became less than enthusiastic about spending night after night performing ritual burial dances to someone who meant little or nothing to them, Shaka descended into a fit of rage. He ordered all the men not seen to be putting enough effort into the mourning executed. He then marched into selected Zulu villages and told his warriors to force every man, woman and child to grieve for his mother on pain of death.

Since his death, Shaka has become a symbol of great pride for the people of the Zulu tribe who still live in South Africa today

After the brutal events of 1827, Shaka had become dangerously unpopular among the Zulus. He was no longer seen as a great warrior and noble leader, but a tyrant soaked in the blood of his own people. As he continued to insist on plunging his kingdom into war after war, his half-brother, Dingane, plotted to assassinate him. On 22 September 1828, Shaka's glorious rule came to an abrupt end when an iklwa was plunged into his back by Dingane and his bodyguard Mbopha. As Shaka lay dying outside of his barracks his last words were: "Are you stabbing me, kings of the Earth? You will come to an end through killing one another." He had fought as a warrior his whole life and could see nothing but warfare as he took his last breath on the African plains.

Defining moment

Death of his mother
1827

Shaka's mother dies in 1827, which causes the warrior king to descend into a deep depression. As his only source of protection and strength during his early years, his mother was a strong influence on him and Shaka insists on elaborate mourning ceremonies that his entire kingdom, including his demoralised warriors, is forced to take part in. As the ceremonies get under way he goes into a psychotic rage when he thinks his people are not mourning hard enough and orders hundreds of his own men killed in front of their families to inspire more effort in honouring his mother's passing.

Annual raids
Beginning in the mid-1820s, Shaka begins to use his standing army to raid the population surrounding his kingdom inspiring fear and ensuring the overwhelming dominance of the Zulus.
1820

The British delegation
A British army officer, Lieutenant James King, visits Shaka and successfully negotiates trade agreements, including permission for the British to build a fort in Zulu territory.
1825

Attack on Delagoa Bay
After the events of the previous year, his soldiers become increasingly demoralised but Shaka presses ahead with building his kingdom, launching raids on the European slave hub at Delagoa Bay in the north of his lands.
1827

Starvation
Shaka's unrelenting quest for power devastates the surrounding region. The continuous warfare causes mass migration into already overpopulated lands and starvation. This becomes known as the Mfecane or 'crushing'.
1828

1828

Betrayal and death
Shaka becomes increasingly unpopular because of the devastation he has brought on the region and is murdered by his half-brother and bodyguard. He leaves behind a Zulu Kingdom that is feared by friend and foe alike.
22 September 1828

© Alamy, Getty

1819 – 1901

Queen Victoria

How a tiny island and its queen came to own an empire so large that the sun never set on it

The date was 22 January 1901 and the British Empire was the largest of any in human history, but the monarch who reigned over it would not live another day. As Queen Victoria lay dying in Osborne House on the Isle of Wight she looked back on a reign that spanned over 63 years. She had seen her empire grow from a collection of scattered isles, separated by vast plains of lands and insurmountable oceans, to the greatest the world had known. It had reached over India, plucked its riches and mounted it as the glimmering jewel in her crown. It had butchered its way mercilessly across Africa at the cost of thousands of British corpses and countless natives who had tried in vain to stand in its way. It was powered forward both by Christian values and colonial greed, so as Victoria drew her last breath, she left a world forever transformed by the empire she had built.

When a young Princess Victoria ascended the steps of Westminster Abbey on her coronation day, few would have foreseen the mighty empire she would eventually rule over. The British public were increasingly disenchanted with the monarchy and her grandfather, the mad king George III, had failed to protect British interest in the Americas, and her uncle George IV's terrible relations with his wife and reckless spending had tarnished the monarchy's prestige. At a mere 18 years and barely 150 centimetres (five feet) tall, Victoria hardly seemed a fitting patron for the vast ambitions of British expansion from the 17th century. But this blue-eyed, silvery-voiced lady possessed a stubborn will of iron and her reign would become the longest in British history until Elizabeth II surpassed her in 2015. Her ascension marked not the death of the British Empire, but the new dawn of a kingdom so massive that none could ever hope to challenge it.

The world was changing as Victoria took her place on the throne. The tiny, scattered rural villages of England were being abandoned en masse and the cities were transforming into sprawling metropolises. Great towering concrete chimneys rose from the ground and the whirr of

Queen Victoria

"The British Empire had the might, ingenuity and limitless ambition to conquer the world"

QUEEN VICTORIA

British, 1819-1901

Brief Bio

Victoria served as monarch of the United Kingdom from 20 June 1837 until her death on 22 January 1901. At 63 years her reign is currently the longest in British history, and is associated with the Industrial Revolution, economic progress and most notably, the expansion of the British Empire to the largest domain of all time.

The World's Greatest Empire

How much of the world Britannia ruled by 1901

Egypt

Finding itself in economic rot, Egypt sold half its stake in the Suez Canal to Britain. This prompted an eventual revolt and launched the 1882 Anglo-Egyptian War. Britain won and took the country under its control. Egypt provided a vital trade route between Britain and India, cutting out the long and dangerous journey around Africa.

Canada

England captured Canada from France after the Seven Years' War in 1763, also known as the French and Indian War. As well as adding a massive landmass to the British Empire's bragging rights, Canada was a resource-rich country with a small population. Canada provided ample trade of timber, ores and furs.

South Africa

The British gained control of the Cape of Good Hope in the early-19th century and set up a colony. When South African Dutch settlers felt their territory was at risk, the two powers engaged in a series of military clashes known as the Boer Wars, leading the Boers to submit to British rule. Serving as a stopping station on the way to India, Southern Africa was also rich in gold and diamonds.

5 things you probably didn't know about Benjamin Disraeli

1. Born to Italian-Jewish parents, Disraeli was the first British prime minister with a Jewish heritage, though he was baptised as a Christian.
2. Disraeli pursued many early business ventures that failed, leaving him in crippling debt, leading to a nervous breakdown from which it took him years to recover.
3. He was mocked in Parliament when he made his maiden speech. Later he proclaimed that "the time will come when you will hear me."
4. Disraeli was a notorious flatterer and when asked by a colleague how to deal with Queen Victoria, he replied: "First of all, remember she is a woman."
5. He introduced much legislation that benefited the poor, such as the 1877 Artisans Dwelling Act that provided housing, as well as the Public Health Act the same year.

"The loss of the love of her life changed not only herself as a person, but the fate of her empire"

machines sounded across the country - the age of steam had arrived. The Industrial Revolution changed Britain from a quaint maritime nation on the edge of Europe into a manufacturing colossus. Railways and steamships brought the British overseas territory closer to the mother country, opening up opportunities for trade and commerce that were previously unfathomable.

It was Albert, Victoria's beloved husband, who opened her and Britain's eyes to the ideas that went on to shape her empire. Fascinated by mechanisms and inventions, Albert organised The Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace – a temple to the ingenuity of the rapidly developing modern world. Inventions from around the world were displayed, but this was Britain's show, first and foremost. The

Timeline Of Conquest

How Victoria's British Empire became the world's biggest

- 1838 PITCAIRN ISLANDS
- 1842 HONG KONG
- 1848 INDIA
- 1853 TRUCIAL OMAN (TRINIDAD & TOBAGO)
- 1857 ADEN (YEMEN)
- 1862 BRITISH HONDURAS (BELIZE)
- 1868 BECHUANANLAND (BOTSWANA)
- 1874 FIJI
- 1878 CYPRUS
- 1878 SOUTH WEST AFRICA (NAMIBIA)
- 1881 NORTH BORNEO (SABAH)
- 1884 BASUTOLAND (LESOTHO)
- 1884 BRITISH SOMALILAND (SOMALILAND)
- 1884 PAPUA NEW GUINEA
- 1885 NIGERIA
- 1885 KENYA
- 1887 MALDIVE ISLANDS
- 1888 BRITISH EAST AFRICA (KENYA)
- 1888 BRUNEI
- 1888 COOK ISLANDS (NZ ASSOC)
- 1888 GAMBIA
- 1888 SARAWAK (MALAYSIA)
- 1889 RHODESIA (ZIMBABWE)
- 1889 TRINIDAD (TRINIDAD & TOBAGO)
- 1890 TANGANYIKA (TANZANIA)
- 1891 MALAWI
- 1894 UGANDA
- 1898 SUDAN
- 1899 KUWAIT

Australia

British involvement in Australia began when Captain James Cook landed on the continent in the late-18th Century. The number of Indigenous Australians living there quickly plummeted because of European diseases and loss of land. Australia became a penal colony and thousands of British convicts were transported there as punishment. When gold was discovered in 1851, immigrants - many of them British - raced to these sandy shores in search of their fortune.

India

After largely being controlled by the East India Company, India became part of the British Empire after the Government of India Act in 1858. Known as the 'jewel in the crown', India was the most valuable piece of Britain's empire, with lucrative trade from spices, jewels and textiles. The most important provision of India, though, was its manpower, which contributed massively to Britain's military might.

symbols of British might, which occupied half of the entire display space, served as clear examples of what the British Empire was capable of and fostered the ideas of national supremacy in the eyes of Victoria, the government and the majority of the British population. The Great Exhibition proved that far from the crumbling remains of a once-powerful nation, the British Empire had the might, ingenuity and limitless ambition to conquer the world.

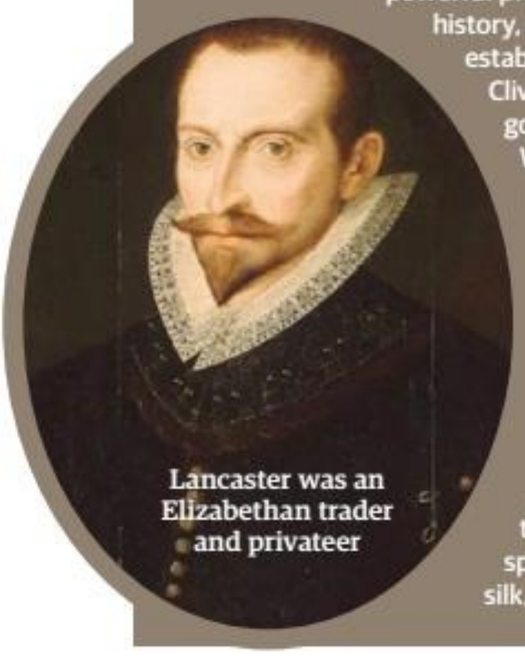
The opportunity to pave the road for this empire arose in 1857 with the Indian Mutiny. India had been ruled by a private entity - the East India Company - from 1757. The rebellion manifested the discontent felt by the Indian people for the blatant disrespect of their beliefs and customs. The company showed disregard for the Indian caste system and issued new cartridges greased with cow and pig fat that had to be opened with the mouth, highly offensive to Muslim and Hindu soldiers. These actions opened the eyes of the Indian people to the daily injustice they were being subjected to, and unrest snowballed into mass riots and an uprising. Although the mutiny was eventually quelled, the rebellion led to the dissolution of the company, the passing of power to the British state and the creation of what Victoria would call the jewel in her crown - the British Indian Empire.

Queen Victoria welcomed the country to her empire in a lavish ceremony, promising that Indian native customs and religions would be respected and that she would "draw a veil over the sad and bloody past." She presented herself as a maternal figure and a crusader for peace, justice and honest government - ideals largely inspired by her husband. Albert had instilled in her mind the vision of King Arthur's Camelot, an empire ruled not by tyranny but by justice, where the strong serve the weak, where good triumphs over evil, bringing not oppression and bloodshed, but trade, education and welfare. His influence on Victoria was immense and when on 14 December 1861 he died of suspected typhoid fever, the empire veered into an entirely new direction.

When Albert drew his last breath in the blue room at Windsor Castle the queen was

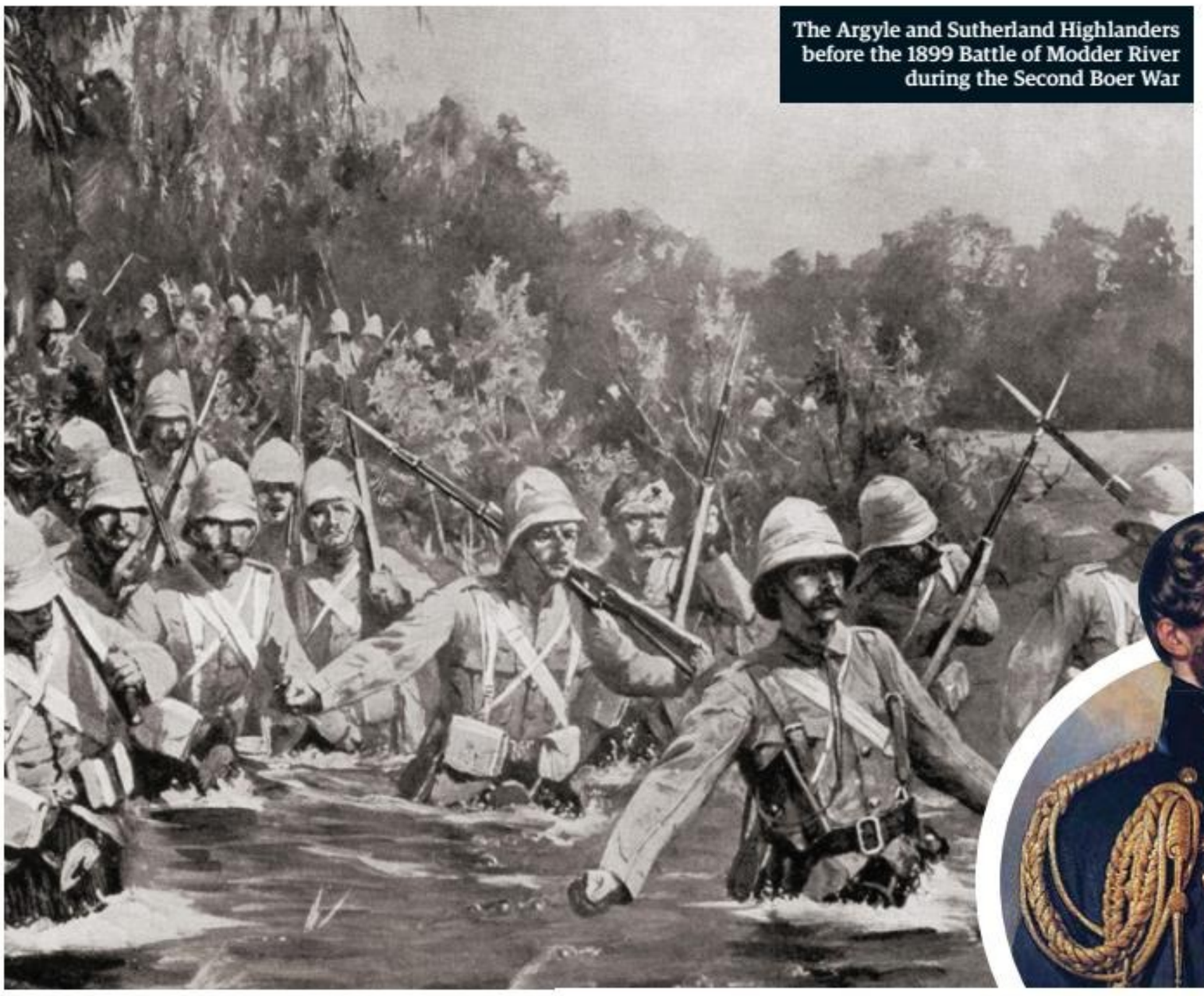
What was the East India Company?

Emerging from humble beginnings, the East India Company began as a simple enterprise of London businessmen who wanted to make money from importing spices. The company was granted a royal charter by Queen Elizabeth I in 1600, and in 1601 James Lancaster led its first voyage. The company set up trade outposts in Indian settlements that slowly developed into commercial towns. Steadily increasing its territory, the company claimed vital trading ports from Aden to Penang. As its control extended, the company became the most powerful private company in history, with its own army established by Robert Clive, the first British governor of Bengal. With its great military power behind it, the company controlled India with a combination of direct rule and alliances with Indian princes. The East India Company eventually accounted for half the world's trade and specialised in cotton, silk, tea and opium.



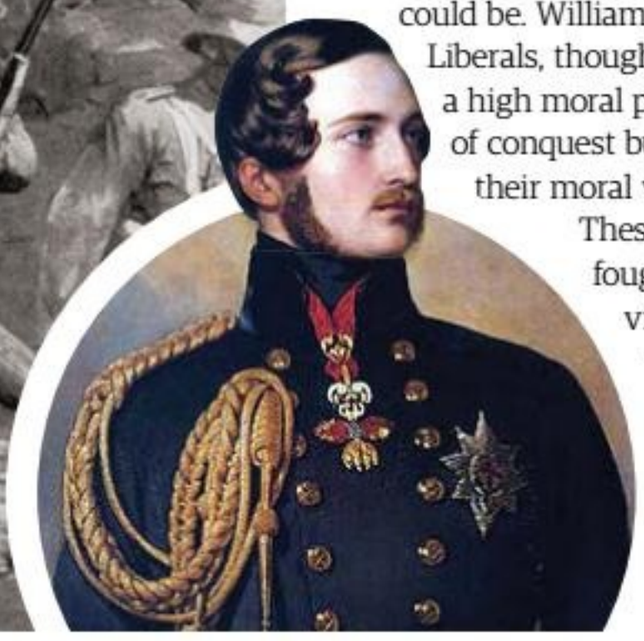
Lancaster was an Elizabethan trader and privateer

The Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders before the 1899 Battle of Modder River during the Second Boer War



inconsolable; the loss of the love of her life changed not only herself as a person, but the fate of her empire. As she donned the mourning clothes she would wear until her own death, she drew a veil over Albert's vision and pursued a different path for her kingdom – one of world domination.

An emerging figure in Parliament would come to foster her views – Benjamin Disraeli. The ambitious and rebellious leader of the Conservatives was led by a passion for imperial power and glory. Inspired by tales of imperial adventures, Disraeli believed Britain should pursue an empire of power and prestige. His most direct political opponent represented everything Albert dreamed the empire could be. William Gladstone, the leader of the Liberals, thought the empire should serve a high moral purpose, to follow not a path of conquest but one of commerce, sharing their moral vision with the world.



These two fiery and driven men fought over these opposing visions in Parliament as Victoria continued to mourn. Without Albert she felt incompetent and unable to face the immense duty that her role dictated. With her strong conservative views she found Gladstone and

A British marketing poster promoting the Suez Canal – the waterway was an important factor in the growth of the empire

"The Industrial Revolution changed Britain from a quaint maritime nation into a manufacturing giant"

his liberal reforms dangerous and unpredictable. Disraeli, suave, coy and dripping with forthright confidence, enchanted the lonely queen. With his constant flattery and sharp wit, Disraeli reignited her interest in politics and captivated her, as Albert had done so previously, with his vision of just how mighty the empire could be. However, Gladstone's liberal vision and Albert's quest for Camelot had not completely faded. The British people, led by strong Protestant beliefs Victoria herself had instilled in them, felt it was Britain's role – their duty even – to civilise people around the world. They believed the British cause was to export not only trade, but also gospel values of morality and justice.

It was in pursuit of this lofty goal that many missionaries turned their attention to Africa. Little was known of the 'Dark Continent', but the common perception was that it was a place of pagan worship ravaged by tribal wars. One missionary in particular would capture the attention of the British nation. Tall, handsome and heroic, David Livingstone embodied everything the British believed their nation to represent. A medical missionary, Livingstone's daring adventures around the continent were followed by a captivated British public. Fighting vicious beasts, battling through dense jungles and suffering a multitude of illnesses, Livingstone was the heroic face of the empire's Christian ideals.

Livingstone's horrific confrontation with African chain gangs was to drive the British cause of expansion. The slavery rife in Africa was abhorrent to Livingstone and the British public, as the practice had been abolished across the empire in 1833. The queen and government united behind Livingstone's quest to find a suitable trade route, hoping that by doing so, the African people would find ways to make a living that wasn't built on the backs of slaves. Livingstone's journey was a failure and he returned to scathing criticism – something the imperialist Disraeli leapt on with glee. His flattery of Victoria had completely won her over and the monarchy and government became united in pursuit of one goal – the expansion of the empire.

The perfect opportunity to begin this new empire emerged as another nation struggled to

How Queen Victoria came to rule the word

Dominance of the seas

Britain employed a 'two-power standard' in 1889 which called for the Royal Navy to maintain a force at least equal to the combined strength of the next two largest navies in the world. This policy ensured British dominance of the seas with a string of naval bases encompassing the whole world. The pure size and strength of the navy served its purpose – deterring any would be competitors and confirming its position as ruler of the waves.

The Industrial Revolution

Britain was the first nation to harness the power of steam and the first to undergo an industrial revolution. This resulted in mass production of low-cost goods to trade around the world. It also gave Britain's military an array of resources like rifles, steamships and trains, equipping it to defeat any possible enemies. Medical advances also allowed British explorers to penetrate remote areas without fear of tropical diseases.

The quest to spread democracy

Land grabbing aside, the British Empire was led by a strong Protestant desire to improve the world. Britain saw itself as an agent of civilisation – one they wanted to spread worldwide, bringing peace, order and stability. This belief that they were doing genuine good led men like David Livingstone to travel to Africa to spread the word of God, and with it, the British Empire.

Taking advantage of the competition

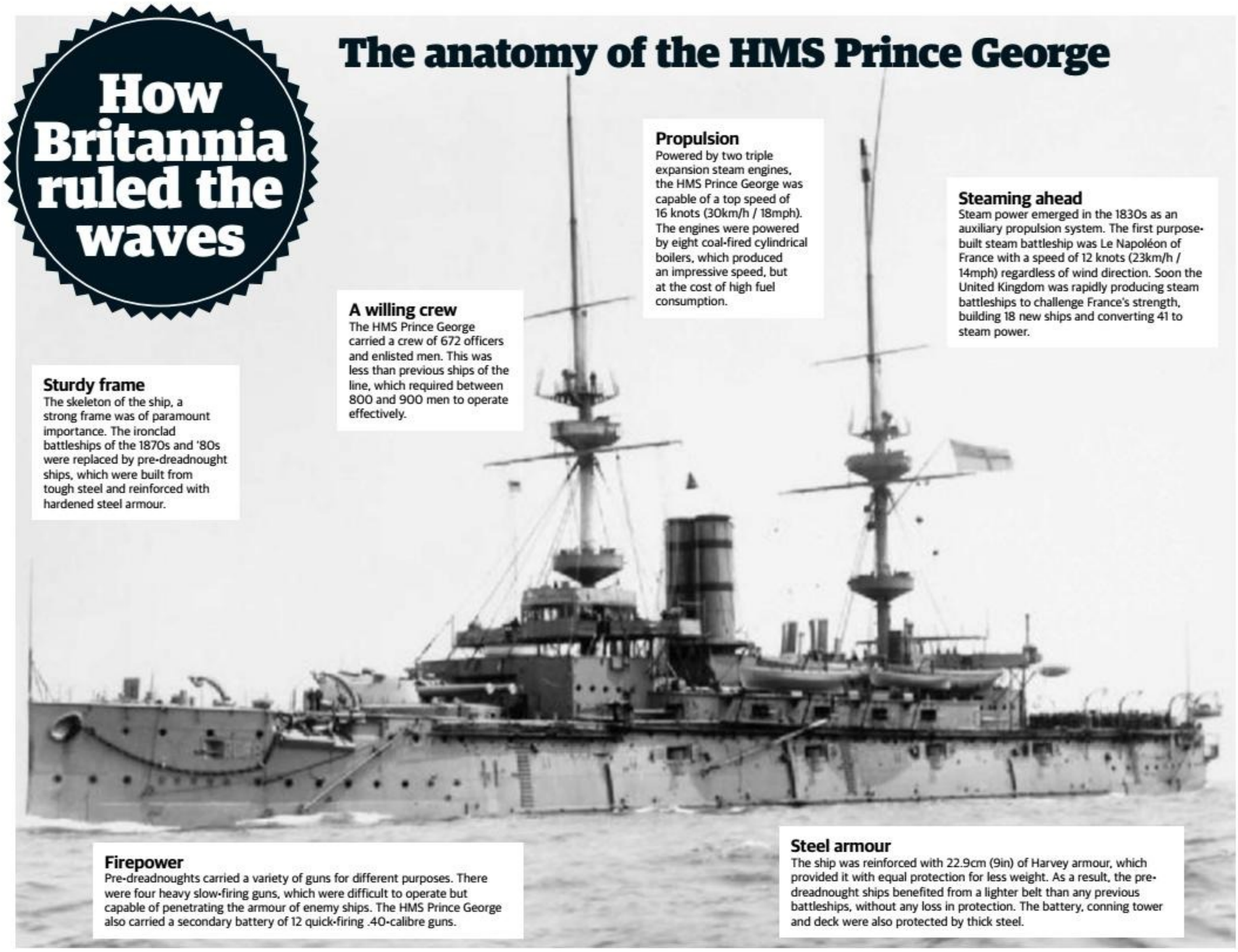
As major powers of the world such as Spain, France, the Netherlands and the Ottomans were losing power, the British began to peak in strength. Britain was able to take advantage of the European wars that had weakened other nations as it enjoyed a period of relative peace, allowing uninterrupted expansion of its empire. Any threats that did emerge, such as Russia, just gave Britain new zeal to cement its powerful hold on the world.

Strong leadership

Britain was ruled by a single monarch throughout most of the 19th century – Queen Victoria. The record-breaking length of her reign brought a sense of stability and contributed to the unconquerable notion of the British Empire. Although Victoria did involve herself in government, her role was symbolic rather than one of direct power, which ensured stability of British politics. While other nations were dealing with socialist movements, Britain enjoyed a long period of relative domestic peace.

How Britannia ruled the waves

The anatomy of the HMS Prince George



A willing crew
The HMS Prince George carried a crew of 672 officers and enlisted men. This was less than previous ships of the line, which required between 800 and 900 men to operate effectively.

Propulsion
Powered by two triple expansion steam engines, the HMS Prince George was capable of a top speed of 16 knots (30km/h / 18mph). The engines were powered by eight coal-fired cylindrical boilers, which produced an impressive speed, but at the cost of high fuel consumption.

Steaming ahead
Steam power emerged in the 1830s as an auxiliary propulsion system. The first purpose-built steam battleship was Le Napoléon of France with a speed of 12 knots (23km/h / 14mph) regardless of wind direction. Soon the United Kingdom was rapidly producing steam battleships to challenge France's strength, building 18 new ships and converting 41 to steam power.

Sturdy frame
The skeleton of the ship, a strong frame was of paramount importance. The ironclad battleships of the 1870s and '80s were replaced by pre-dreadnought ships, which were built from tough steel and reinforced with hardened steel armour.

Firepower
Pre-dreadnoughts carried a variety of guns for different purposes. There were four heavy slow-firing guns, which were difficult to operate but capable of penetrating the armour of enemy ships. The HMS Prince George also carried a secondary battery of 12 quick-firing .40-calibre guns.

Steel armour
The ship was reinforced with 22.9cm (9in) of Harvey armour, which provided it with equal protection for less weight. As a result, the pre-dreadnought ships benefited from a lighter belt than any previous battleships, without any loss in protection. The battery, conning tower and deck were also protected by thick steel.

survive. The Egyptian ruler, Isma'il Pasha, was confronted with crippling debts after reckless spending on lavish ceremonies and a costly war with Ethiopia. In an act of desperation he made an offer to sell to the British Egypt's shares in the Suez Canal. The canal was more than a mere trading port; it opened up a short route to India across Egypt and down the Red Sea, cutting out the lengthy journey around Africa. The Egyptian ruler's offer would give the British controlling influence over the jugular of the empire, so Disraeli urged Victoria to accept. She immediately did and the Suez Canal fell into British hands.

With control of India, Britain was already the most powerful nation on Earth and three-quarters of the world's trade was transported in British ships, but this control was being threatened. The Russian Empire had been steadily expanding east and south and was getting uncomfortably close to Victoria's prized jewel – India. The Middle East was largely controlled by the Turks, but they were busy dealing with violent rebellions. The Turkish treatment of their Christian subjects was shocking and atrocious, but as Russia backed the rebels the British had no option but to support the Turks. The British public, to whom Russia stood for everything Britain opposed – ignorance, slavery and subjugation – largely supported this choice. Facing the prospect of imminent war with the strongest nation on the planet, Russia agreed to peace talks and thanks in part to the charisma and negotiation skills of Disraeli, agreed to stop their advance on the Middle East.

Imperial spirit rushed through the public as the might of British muscle flexed and proved itself again. As the empire continued its steady expansion across the continent it came face to face with the most powerful African nation – the Zulus. The British, with a bloated ego, underestimated the strength of their spear-wielding enemies and suffered a crushing initial defeat. In the end it took 16,000 British reinforcements to prise the Zulus' independence from their grip. Expecting to return to a wave of praise for their daring exploits, the victorious army were surprised to discover that British opinions were changing once again.

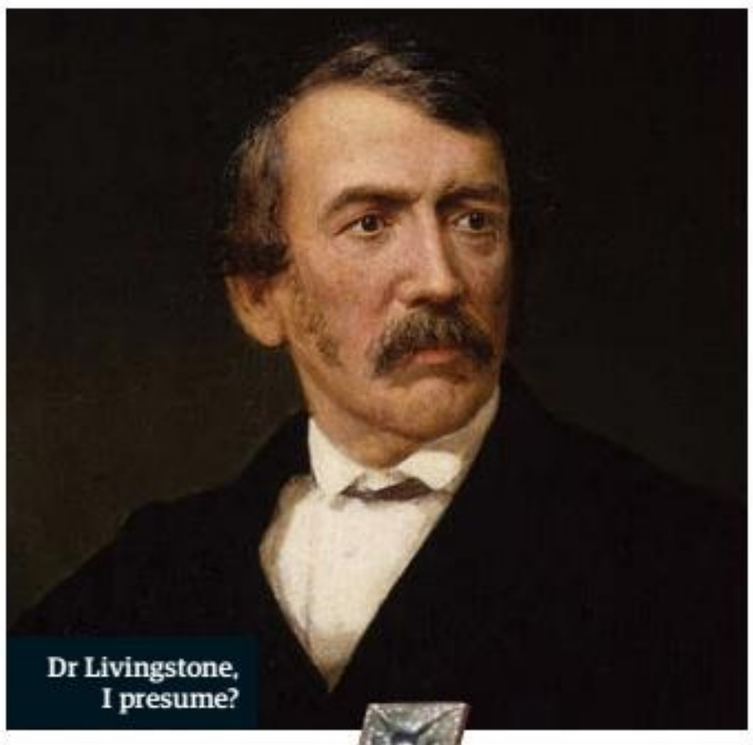
Gladstone, the "half-mad firebrand", as Victoria dubbed him, preached his outraged opinions about the mass slaughter of Zulus and rampant destruction of their homes. Victoria was outraged but the public sided with Gladstone and, much to the queen's dismay, the power of the government switched hands once more. Liberal leader or not, all of Europe's attention was firmly fixed on Africa as nations began a scramble to establish colonies there. In amongst this mad rush to establish new territory by European powers, it was arguably one man's actions that would determine the ultimate fate of Victoria's empire.

Led by Muhammad Ahmed, revolution was tearing through the Sudan as tribes rose against their corrupt rulers. As this holy war drew uncomfortably close to the Suez Canal, Victoria

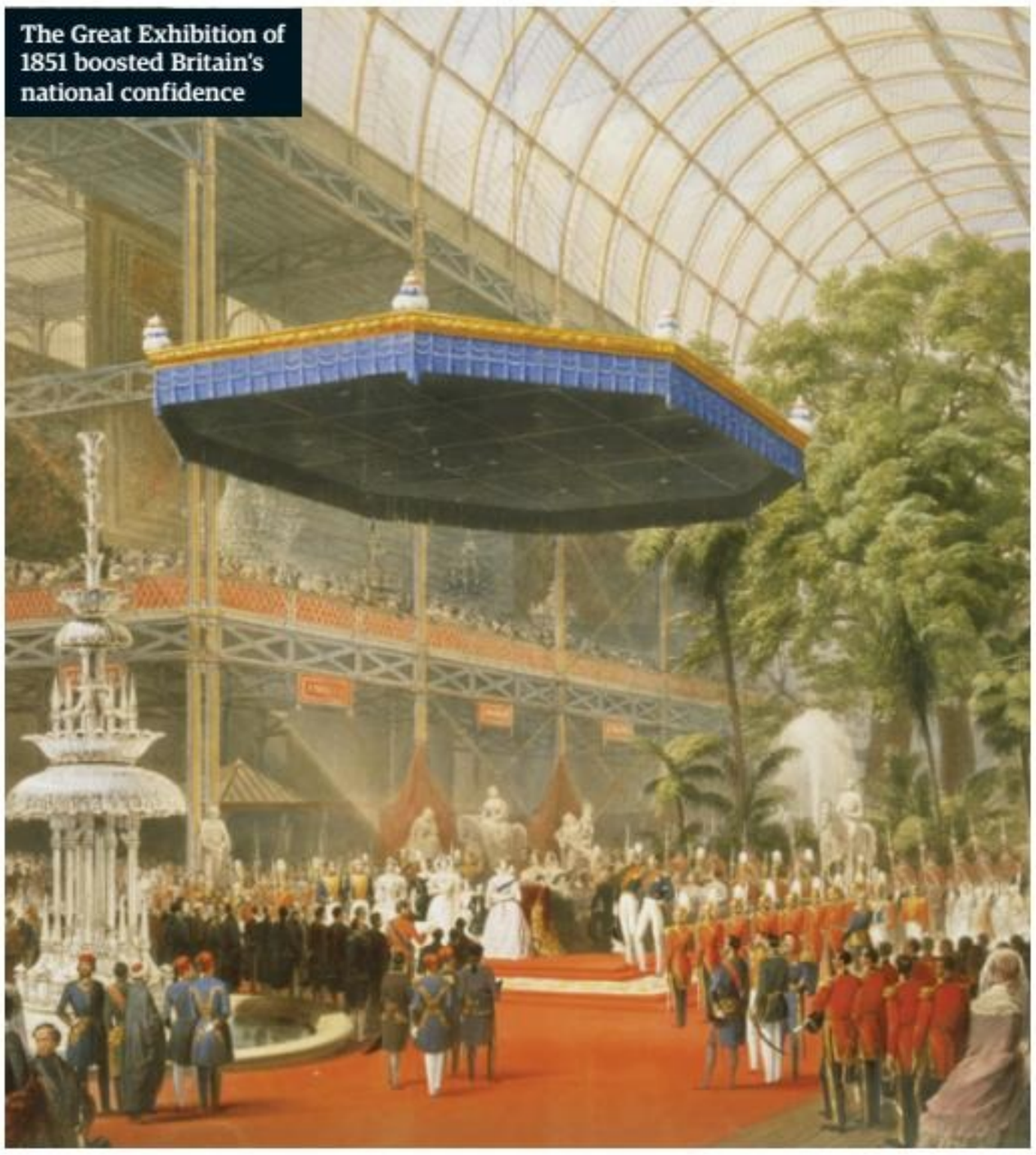
"They believed the British cause was to export not only trade, but also gospel values of morality and justice"

urged Gladstone to utilise the British troops stationed there to defend it. The liberal leader refused. In order to buy time he sent one man, General Charles Gordon, to secure the evacuation of loyal civilians and soldiers.

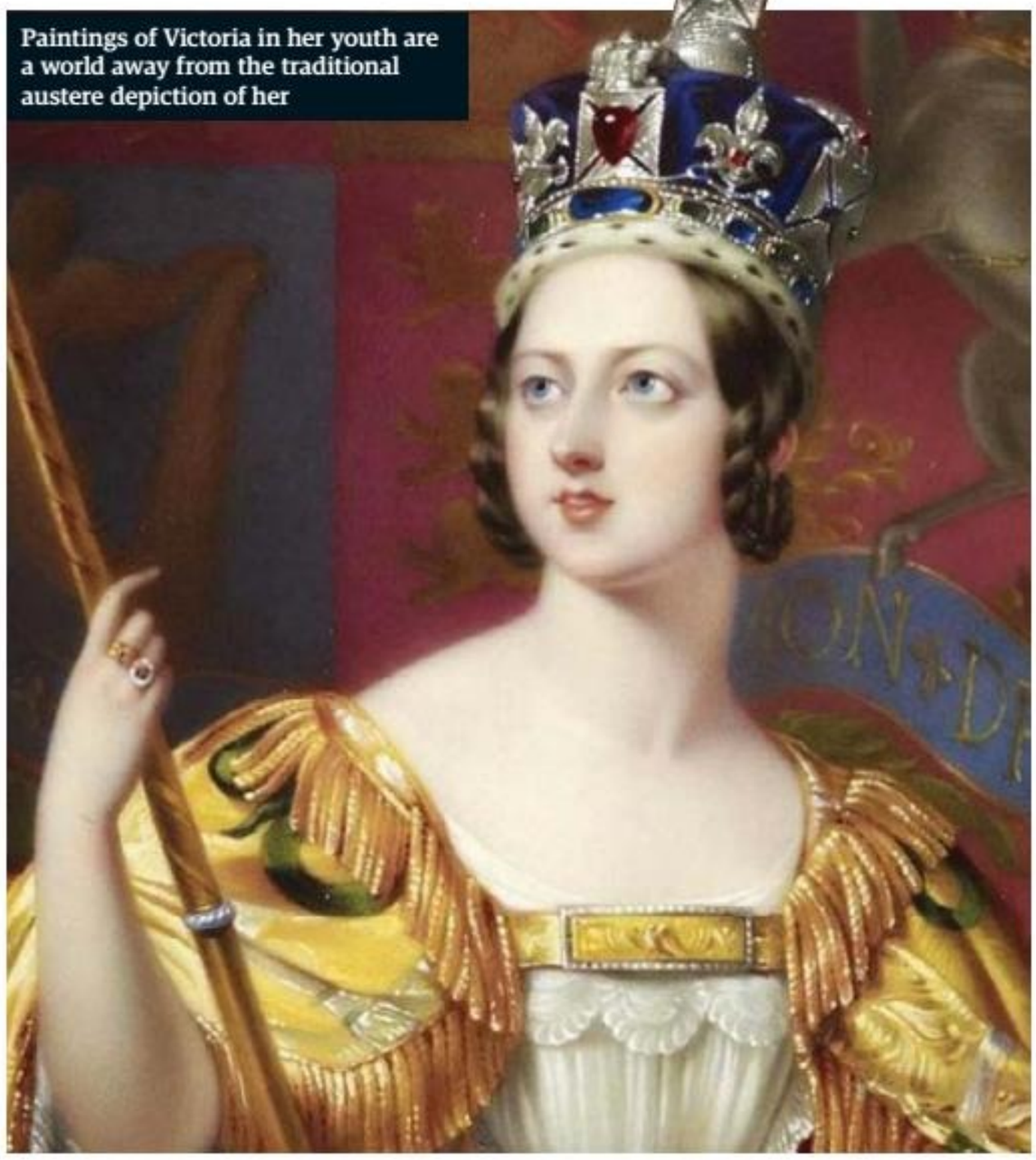
Like Livingstone, Gordon was a national hero. He was brave, dashing, popular and his decorated military career had painted him in the British public's eyes as a gleaming knight of old. Despite these qualities Gordon was also wild and unpredictable. When he reached the Sudan he was horrified by the slavery rife in the region and decided to face the Mahdi in battle. With limited forces, Gordon soon found himself besieged in the city of Khartoum. His appeals for aid, to the adoring public's outrage, fell on deaf ears in the government. It took more than eight months of public fury to finally force Gladstone's hand, but it was too late – Gordon, the nation's hero of Christianity, was dead.



Dr Livingstone, I presume?



The Great Exhibition of 1851 boosted Britain's national confidence



Paintings of Victoria in her youth are a world away from the traditional austere depiction of her

Main competitors

Three countries that were battling with Britain for territory

Russia

As England expanded its territory, so did Russia. For a hundred years Russia expanded east and south, narrowing the gap between the British and Russian Empires in Central Asia. Britain soon became obsessed with protecting India which was a rich source of goods and manpower. The competition for dominance of the states that separated them – Iran, Afghanistan and Tibet – became commonly known as The Great Game. The looming, but unlikely, threat of Russia's attack led Britain into largely unnecessary military involvement in Afghanistan and Tibet.

Germany

From 1850 onward, Germany began to industrialise at an astonishing rate, transforming from a rural nation to a heavily urban one. In the space of a decade Germany's navy grew massively and became the only one able to challenge the British. Although the German Empire of the late-19th century consisted of only a few small colonies, the newly unified state slowly moved toward colonial expansion in Asia and the Pacific. As Wilhelm II rose to power, his aggressive policies in achieving a 'place in the sun' similar to Britain was one of the factors that would lead to WWI.

France

Britain's age-old rival France was still licking its wounds after the loss of most of its imperial colonies in the early part of the 19th century. However, French leaders began a mission to restore its prestige in 1850, seeking to claim land in North and West Africa as well as in Southeast Asia. After the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War, it still continued with zeal to expand its empire, acquiring land in China and all over Africa. Unlike most of its rivals, France would continue expanding after WWI, well into the 1930s.

7 Eye-watering empire facts

458 million
people ruled over

23%
of the world's surface was ruled by Britain

13.01 million
square miles of land belonged to the empire

113
ships in the Royal Navy

63 years & 21 days
the length of Victoria's reign

165,000
convicts sent to Australia

7,010,000
total goods shipped by Britain in one year (1881)

General Gordon organised a year-long defence of Sudan but a relief force arrived two days after the city had fallen and he had been killed

"The monarchy and government became united in pursuit of one goal – the expansion of the empire"

In an instance the liberal vision was shattered, Gladstone was voted out and his moral influence departed with him. The renewed crusading spirit of British imperialism found its poster boy in a man who would lead the empire down a dark and dangerous path. Moving from England to Africa to work on a cotton farm, Cecil John Rhodes had become outrageously wealthy from the diamond rush, but he wanted more – the whole of Africa. Driven by greed and lust for power, Rhodes wished to create a British colony across Africa, not for the betterment of its people or to spread Christian values, but for profit and business.

Using the tenacity and cunning that had elevated him to success, Rhodes tricked and butchered his way across the continent with the British government backing him every bloody step of the way. Rhodes made it his purpose to make the world English and famously said: "If there be a God, I think that what he would like me to do is paint as much of the map of Africa British Red as possible." His path of colonial greed led Britain head-first into a conflict now known as the Boer Wars.

Gold had been found in Transvaal in northern South Africa and Rhodes worried that this would prompt an alliance with the Germans, thus cutting off his route to the north of the continent. Rhodes planned an uprising to overthrow the Boer leaders, but it did not go as planned – far from the naked, spear-wielding foes he had previously conquered, the Boers had guns, and they fought back hard with skill and courage.

Outrage tore across Europe against what was seen as an unprovoked attack on an independent state, but not in Britain. Fully convinced of their noble mission, the British people believed the Boers

"As more British bodies piled up, British confidence in their own unconquerable might began to wane in Africa"

to be vicious and uncompromising. More soldiers poured into the region into a war they believed would be short and glorious, but as more British bodies piled up – Victoria's own grandson among them – British confidence began to wane.

As British reinforcements continued to flood into the territory the tide slowly began to turn. Rhodes had managed to squeeze a win from the jaws of defeat and the Boer territories became British colonies. The empire had grown, but at a cost. Rhodes' controversial actions during the war – including forming what would come to be known as the first concentration camps – had been a step too far for the British public. What had begun as a noble quest of Christianity had transformed into a greedy and brutal scramble for power. When Rhodes died his merciless version of imperialism was buried with him in the dry African dirt.

When Victoria passed away she was finally rid of the black mourning clothes she had worn for 40 years and was dressed entirely in white. Spring flowers were scattered around her body and her wedding veil was placed on her head as she prepared to reunite with the dearest love of her life. She was, however, leaving another behind; the Empire she had mothered now stretched across the globe with large swathes still coloured in the pink of British rule. As the sun set on the quiet room in which she lay in Osborne House, it was rising on the bustling spice markets of India, and soon the vast plains of British land in Africa would be bathed in warm golden light. Victoria had died, but the legacy she left behind continued to expand over the face of the planet. Even without their driver, the cogs of the British Empire whirred steadily on for another half century at least.

1892 caricature of Cecil Rhodes, after he announced plans for a telegraph line and railroad from Cape Town to Cairo

A satirical cartoon from 1876 poking fun at the relationship between Queen Victoria and Benjamin Disraeli

An official photograph of Victoria, taken in 1893

1892 – 1975

Haile Selassie I

Controversial for some, but an inspiration and even God for many others, the Lion of Judah is one of Africa's most important figures

The year is 1966, and a crowd of thousands is gathered at Palisadoes Airport in Kingston, Jamaica, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the one they call the King of Kings, the Lion of Judah, the Almighty One. Scores of devoted Rastafarians have travelled from across the country to catch a glimpse of the man they believe to be God on Earth, an African Emperor travelling thousands of miles across the ocean to visit this small Caribbean nation. A hum of drums and joyous singing rings through the air and as the long-awaited plane finally lands and crawls to a halt, a symbol of a lion blazoned on its side, the crowd surges to meet it. Officials appeal for calm from the crowd for some minutes before eventually a figure is spotted at the top of the plane's landing steps. An elderly man of small stature, wearing a military uniform that almost engulfs him, steps out to greet the ecstatic crowd – Haile Selassie has arrived.

> He was the last emperor of Ethiopia, which fell into turmoil after his deposition

Though in later life he would brush shoulders with world leaders and even be worshipped as God among men, Haile Selassie's surroundings at his birth, at least, were humble. He was born Tafari Makonnen in a simple mud hut, in Ejersa Gora, Ethiopia. His father, Ras Makonnen, was the governor of Harrar, an Ethiopian province, as well as a close advisor of Emperor Menelik II. After his father's death, Tafari became close with the Emperor, who saw great potential in the young man who was made the governor of Harrar when he was just 17.

> He was and still is revered by Rastafarians as a prophet from God and even a reincarnation of Jesus Christ

The young Tafari's rise to power was quick and in 1913, at the age of just 21, he became regent and heir apparent to the late Emperor's daughter, Zauditu. During this period he struggled against the Empress' relative conservatism and resistance to modernisation, but he did successfully bring Ethiopia into the League of Nations, the international body set up in the aftermath of World War I, in 1923. His reforms of the country signalled further centralisation of power, removing many of the powers held by regional rulers. In 1930, Empress Zauditu died, and Tafiri was able to assume the throne. He took the name Haile Selassie, meaning Power of the Trinity, as his official title, a name that would very shortly be known throughout the world.

Over his first few years as Emperor, Selassie sought to continue his education reforms, modernising education and placing his country further on the world stage. However, he couldn't have predicted the horrific crisis looming on the horizon that would devastate Ethiopia. The menace of Fascism had been gradually sprouting in Italy since the 1920s, and by the 1930s Benito Mussolini was in complete control of the country as dictator. Known as Il Duce or The Leader, Mussolini was seeking to build a new Roman Empire for himself, to restore Italian

HAILE SELASSIE I
Ethiopia, 1892-1975

Brief Bio

Born Tafari Makonnen, his title, 'Ras' (roughly equivalent to duke), gives him the name that we associate with the movement that bears it, Rastafarianism. Those who follow this faith believe that this Ethiopian Emperor was a god on Earth, even a representative of Jesus Christ himself. To add to the symbolism, his regnal name means 'Power of the Trinity'.

Haile Selassie I

Like many of Ethiopia's traditional leaders, he drew his authority as a direct descendent of King Soloman

The Second Italo-Ethiopian War

On 3 October 1935 Italy invaded Ethiopia on the presupposition of retaliating against a cross-border attack. In reality, Mussolini was seeking to gain greater control over East Africa, as well as regain Italian pride after its defeat to the African nation in the 19th Century. Il Duce was also looking to exploit the rich mineral wealth that he believed lay in Ethiopia's earth. Selassie reacted to the aggression initially by withdrawing his troops away from the advancing Italian force, in a bid to display an unaggressive front and perhaps negotiate a peace. As the war continued and it became more likely that the invaders would win, Selassie chose to flee the country and began travelling to England. In his later speech to the League of Nations, Selassie spoke of how the Italians used chemical weapons on civilians, in order to terrorise the population into surrender, or even to wipe them out altogether. After five years of occupation, the Italian occupation came to an end when British forces, along with Ethiopian resistance fighters and their allies, expelled Mussolini's army. This came shortlyafter the outbreak of World War II, with Fascist Italy allied to Nazi Germany. Selassie finally returned to his home country in 1941.

"Haile Selassie chose to flee Ethiopia as the inevitable conclusion to the war became apparent"

pride and exploit the mineral wealth of Africa. Years earlier, at the end of the 19th century, Italy had tried and failed to take Ethiopia in an embarrassing series of defeats by the army of Emperor Menelik II. By 1934 the European power was poised to strike once again, but this time with deadly efficiency. On 3 October 1935 the Italian army invaded and within a year the country had been conquered.

In a move that attracted much criticism from his opponents in later life, Selassie chose to flee Ethiopia as the inevitable conclusion to the war became apparent. He escaped through neighbouring French-held territories on his way to England. The full horrors of the war he left behind would not be fully revealed to the world until June of the same year when he addressed the 52 state members of the League of Nations. In his famous speech, he decried the inaction of the League, which he had expected to protect his vulnerable country, as was its mandate. He also spoke of the great atrocities that were committed by the Italian army as it pressed forward. "It is not only upon warriors that the Italian Government has made war," he said. "It has above all attacked populations far removed from hostilities, in order to terrorise and exterminate them." His accounts that Italy had been using chemical weapons - including noxious gases that had been banned since the end of the First World War - were shocking. His ominous warning to the League is perhaps one of the most famous forewarnings of the impending world war: "I decided to come myself to bear witness against the crime perpetrated against my people and give Europe a warning of the doom that awaits it, if it should bow before the accomplished fact."

In his speech to the League of Nations in 1936, he warned of a horror awaiting Europe, foreshadowing World War II

Selassie spent the remainder of the 1930s in exile, in a small house near Bath, England and became a symbol of the resistance against the Italian invaders. Soon enough Europe slipped into war once again in 1939, and in 1940 Mussolini declared war on Britain and France, joining with Hitler. The Italian adventure in Africa came to a decisive close as British colonial forces and their allies drove the Italians out of most of Africa in what became known as the East African Campaign. A combined force of African, Ethiopian and British Commonwealth troops helped to free Ethiopia and in 1941 Selassie re-entered Addis Ababa to retake his throne.

After his return, Selassie was if anything more determined to centralise the country's power around himself, as well as further modernise its infrastructure, though this contradiction would later cost him dearly. In 1950 he founded the University of Addis Ababa and in 1955 released a

Defining moment

Appeal to the League of Nations
June 1936

Speaking in Geneva, Haile's famous speech to the League of Nations, denouncing the Italian invasion of his country, catapults him even further onto the world stage. As a member of the League, Ethiopia expected the support of the other countries and Haile even explained how this presupposed protection deterred him from preparing for the Italian threat. He decries the use of chemical weapons, including mustard gas and other noxious substances sprayed down by the Italian air force. These weapons had been prohibited since the First World War, where their use had been devastating. Haile calls upon the League to act in defence of his small nation and warns that a similar fate is awaiting the countries of Europe.

Timeline

1892

Born in Ejersa Goro
Haile is born Tafari Makonnen in a province of Ethiopia, in a mud hut. He is the only surviving legitimate heir of Ras Makonnen, the governor or Harrar and advisor to Emperor Menelik II.
23 July 1892

Becomes regent
Emperor Menelik II dies with no male heir and Tafari becomes regent, with the late Emperor's daughter Zauditu inheriting the position of Empress.
1913

Crowned Emperor
After Zauditu dies on 2 April, Tafari inherits the crown. He adopts the new title Haile Selassie, or 'power of the trinity', as his official name as Emperor.
2 November 1930

Mussolini invades
In a bid to expand its Imperial ambitions and extend its control over Africa, Italy invades Ethiopia. This brief war lasts until May 1936, when the Italian army enters Addis Ababa.
3 October 1935

Exile in England
After the Italian occupation, Haile flees to England, where he remains in exile. He buys Fairfield House near Bath, Somerset, where he spends the next five years.
2 May 1936

The East Africa Campaign
With the help of British and other forces, the Italian army is defeated in Ethiopia and the occupation comes to an end. Haile returns and reforms a government.
January 1941

new constitution for the country, extending voting rights further. However, he still maintained close control over the main facets of government, with all the key figures of authority, including the prime minister, acting almost as his royal court. These policies struck a peculiar balance – on the one side stretching out the hand of modernity and progress, while with the other maintaining a vice grip over all the executive power.

By the turn of the Sixties, Selassie was becoming an elderly man, but some of his most turbulent years still lay ahead of him. While the Emperor was on a state visit abroad, a group of disgruntled students, along with members of Selassie's own bodyguard, attempted to form a coup and take over the government. Though the plotters failed due to hopeless planning, it rocked the royal boat and gave the country a taste of mayhem to come. The very intelligentsia he had created through his reforms had turned against him.

Undeterred, Selassie continued to build his legacy, founding the Organisation of African Unity in 1963, a body designed to bring together the continent's nations and end colonisation, as well as making numerous state visits all over the world. He visited America several times, a country he greatly admired and relied on as an ally, but perhaps his defining and for many people most memorable visit was to Jamaica in 1966.

From the moment of his crowning as Emperor, from 1930 onwards, a sect of dedicated followers had formed in Jamaica, known as Rastafari. The religious sub-culture was and still is entirely based around Selassie himself, taking his name before his coronation, Ras Tafiri, as its identity. The Rastafari worshipped Selassie as the living God on Earth, the promised descendant of Solomon, the African King. As the land ruled, Ethiopia was also considered sacred, and many Rastafari believed and still believe it to be their Zion, the holy land where they should return. His brief visit to Jamaica in 1966 was a poignant occasion for the movement, which swelled in numbers in later years after the emergence of and popularity of Bob Marley and reggae music.

If the Emperor's popularity abroad was on a high, it couldn't have been more different on his own soil. The seeds he had planted with his educational and structural reforms had by now taken root in the form of a progressive and leftist youth, impelled by the liberal Sixties and hungry for faster progression and greater freedoms than the old regime was willing to provide.

By 1974, the revolutionary aspects of the military, buoyed by new ideology and ambition, were ready to make their move on the government and forced the Emperor to step down in September of that year. Not long after, in August the following year, Selassie was declared dead while in the custody of the revolutionary government. Though his reign cannot be characterised as perfect, the Lion of Judah embodied the great changes that happened to his country and Africa as a whole throughout the 20th Century. Certainly, he occupies the unique position of being revered as a god, and it is for this, as well as remaining the enduring symbol of his nation and his people, that he is remembered.

> The word Rastafari actually derives from Selassie's former title and given name, Ras Tafari

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, in his study

Life in the time of Haile Selassie

The League of Nations
Formed in the aftermath of the First World War, the League of Nations consisted of 52 member states. The League's aims included protecting its members from aggressive nations, as well as preventing illegal trafficking, though the outbreak of World War II is testament to its overall ineffectiveness.

Italian Colonialism
After his gradual rise to becoming the Fascist dictator of Italy in the 1920s, Mussolini sought to create his new Roman Empire, with himself at its head. As well as restoring hurt Italian pride, Il Duce also believed that by taking parts of mineral-rich Africa he could solve his country's economic woes.

The Rastafari Movement
Emerging around the 1930s, largely in Jamaica, the Rastafari movement mixes Zionist Christian theology with ritualistic cannabis use. Rastafarians consider Haile Selassie to be God on Earth, as they believe is prophesised in the Bible.

The Organisation of African Unity
The OAU was founded in Addis Abba, the capital of Ethiopia, by Haile Selassie. Its chief aim was to strengthen the bonds between the nations of the continent and to form a united front against external aggressors and colonialism in general. It was eventually disbanded in 2002.

Spread of Marxism
Communism and Marxism were the most influential political ideologies to emerge during the 20th century and reshaped the political landscapes of the world forever. Though they were slower to become popular in Ethiopia, left-wing, socialist and progressive ideals became more and more popular as the century wore on.

Defining moment

Visit to the Caribbean
21 April 1966

On landing in Kingston, Jamaica on a state visit, Haile is greeted by a frenzied crowd of thousands, many of whom are members of the Rastafari movement. Emerging during the 1930s, this religious and spiritual movement claimed that the Ethiopian Emperor was divine and even a reincarnation of Jesus Christ. During his brief visit, Haile addressed both houses of the Jamaican parliament and laid a wreath of remembrance at Kingston's war memorial. His presence causes utter chaos wherever he travels around the island, such is the devotion of those people who consider him to be God on Earth. It's debated whether Haile actually denied or supported the claims of his divinity.

Silver jubilee
Haile celebrates 25 years as Emperor and in the same year grants a new constitution giving greater freedoms to his subjects, without diminishing his own powers.
2 November 1955

A failed coup
While on a visit abroad, groups of discontent students, in collaboration with members of the royal bodyguard and army, attempt to organise a coup to depose the Emperor.
14 December 1960

Deposed as Emperor
By now advanced in age, the Emperor is no longer able to maintain the authority he once held and he is deposed by a socialist coup led by the military, beginning the Ethiopian Revolution.
13 September 1974

Death
Haile Selassie dies while in the custody of the revolutionary military government at the age of 83. The circumstances of his death are still shrouded in suspicion.
27 August 1975

1975

© Alamy, Getty, Corbis

1894 – 1972

Edward VIII

Edward VIII shocked the world in 1936 when he announced to Britain and her empire that he was abdicating his throne for an American socialite named Wallis Simpson

In the late Thirties, Britain was facing its darkest hour. Hitler and his fascist thugs were rattling the sabre across Europe, quashing the rights of free men and women everywhere. Italy and Spain had fallen to the oppression of right-wing dictatorships and it wouldn't be long before war would sweep through the last free countries of the European continent. This was a time for stout hearts and stiff upper lips, for every British soul to look to the defence of the country and face these evil forces valiantly. Meanwhile Edward, Duke of Windsor, who until very recently had been King of Great Britain, sat in his villa in Antibes, France.

Edward's childhood and teenage years were a preparatory education to groom him for the day he would become King of Great Britain. He had one-to-one tuition with the best tutors in the land and attended renowned military schools – yet he was deeply unhappy. His father George, later to be crowned King George V, stood as a domineering and at times terrifying figure to Edward and his two siblings. George ran his household like a military operation, the children were forced to always be on time, to dress correctly and behave properly. Punishments included frightening confrontations with George in his study; a harsh prospect for Edward who was small and shy.

At just 12-years-old, Edward's father felt he needed a military education in order to prepare him for public life. He was sent to the naval college at Osborne on the Isle of Wight. Edward's shy nature meant that he struggled to fit in with the other boys and bullying was an almost inevitable consequence. He did eventually find his feet and settled into this regimented life, passing the naval examination board for Dartmouth officer school in 1909. Edward continued to be a shy young man. During his cadet training, his parents threw a party for him at Buckingham Palace about which he recorded in his diary, 'I had to dance, a thing I hate, the whole thing was a great strain.' The 19-year-old Edward was still struggling to find his place in the world outside of the ritual of royal protocol.

> According to his biographers Edward had an unhappy childhood; his nanny would deliberately hurt him

It was clear that Edward lacked direction but World War I would see to it that all men of his age would be given a chance to prove themselves. Edward wanted to serve with the men of his army regiment on the frontline, he yearned to make a difference and war afforded him the opportunity. Unfortunately, the Secretary for War Lord Kitchener refused his request stating that it would be too dangerous for the young man. Edward continued to insist on being allowed to go and in the end toured the front regardless.

His admiration for the troops was shown in a correspondence he sent back to England, 'I'm very keen on the fighting troops being made as comfortable as possible always... the poor devils have a bloody enough time in the trenches... they are absolutely marvellous.' The war years had given Edward a sense of freedom he wouldn't normally have been permitted, he could meet other

"He continued to make horrendous errors in judgement, conducting a tour of Nazi Germany in 1937 and allowing himself to be photographed with Hitler"

During World War I Edward visited the trenches and saw first-hand the devastation and suffering caused by modern warfare

Wallis Simpson was the love of Edward's life, though it was known that he had other mistresses previously

EDWARD VIII

Britain, 1894 – 1972

Brief Bio

Playboy prince Edward never really wanted to be king, but the death of his father forced it on him. The rigours of an unhappy childhood resulted in a man who pursued pleasure and he struggled to combine this with his royal duties as Prince of Wales. His affair with Wallis Simpson sounded the death knell for his kingship.

A dark connection

The dark connection between Hitler and the British royal family in the Thirties begun in 1935 when the Fuhrer used Charles Edward, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha as an informal ambassador of goodwill to the royal family. Charles seemed to have succeeded in persuading Edward that Hitler was the only defence against communism. The connection grew stronger when Edward decided to visit Germany in 1937. A clandestine meeting between Edward and committed Nazis Rudolf Hess and Martin Bormann took place in Edward's hotel in Paris before the visit. An impression of the meeting written by Hess informed Hitler that, 'the Duke was proud of his German blood' and there was 'no need to lose a single German life in invading Britain. The Duke and his clever wife will deliver the goods.' Hess fully expected Edward to regain power in Britain and persuade the populace to seek peace. The visit to Germany then went ahead, Hitler was charming and Edward enjoyed his tour. As the war progressed, a secret memorandum to American president Roosevelt from J Edgar Hoover claimed, 'that the Duke of Windsor entered into an agreement. If Germany was victorious [Herman Goering] would install the Duke of Windsor as King of England.' While it seems unlikely Edward did agree to this, he must have maintained links with the Nazis for this type of rumour to circulate.

men his own age under the guise of these tours and drop the cold protocol normally required of official visits.

After the armistice it was as if this new-found freedom had disappeared with the rifles and bayonets. He commented in 1919, ' I mixed with men... I found my manhood.' His father was quick to clip his new found self-confidence sternly informing him, 'don't think you act like other people.' He longed for the freedom given to him during the war and found his new life of state openings and formal banquets smothering. He drifted through his university career failing to make an impact academically and then went on an extended tour of the empire. While this should have offered him the adventure he yearned for, he quickly saw that he was just as much a prisoner abroad as he was at home. Every step he took was closely monitored, and he became frustrated and depressed. His frustration made him angry and he began to display the bigotry and dismissive nature inherited by many English aristocracy of the time. He was appalled by the Australian aborigines describing them as, 'the most revolting form of living creatures I've ever seen.' He also began to hate communism with unrelenting zeal.

It was during this unhappy time that in 1931 he met the woman that would change his life forever – Wallis Simpson. Edward had already had a number of affairs but they were fleeting. In Wallis he found something that he hadn't seen in other women, a strong independent character that knew her own mind and refused to stand on ceremony. He quickly became infatuated by her, it was said by observers that he lost 'all sense of reason' when he was around her. He lavished her with jewellery, gold or whatever she wanted, it seemed as if Edward had finally found someone to give his life meaning. There was however a complication as far as Edward's position as the Prince of Wales was concerned; Wallis was a married woman. When she became Edward's mistress she promised to give up her second husband for him but this wouldn't soothe the sensibilities of his family. To compound the issue she wasn't from a royal household, she was an American socialite from Baltimore. When it became obvious to Edward's father in 1934 that this wasn't another casual relationship he was furious; he angrily told him to get rid of her.

> Edward gained his pilot's licence and founded the 32 Royal squadron, used for royal flights to official engagements

On 20 January 1936, George V died and the question of Wallis's status was immediately brought into question. Would she become queen? The short answer was absolutely not – she was twice divorced and unpopular with the British establishment. Absurd rumours circulated about the spell she had placed Edward under, her devious manipulation, her dark hold over the new king. The issue was becoming even more serious, especially considering that the country was edging ever closer to another world war. The nation needed leadership, not uncertainty, but Edward did not see the two issues as related. He wanted to marry Wallis, and everything else was of secondary importance. Besides, Adolf Hitler would defeat the

Defining moment

Tour of the empire

5 August 1919

After the war, Edward spends the next five years touring the empire and representing his father abroad. He does a number of public relation events including presenting the Prince of Wales cup to the Canadian hockey league and visiting the politically sensitive city of Quebec where he receives a warm welcome. His charm and good looks serve him well and he becomes a popular figure. Not all of his visits went so smoothly however; in a high-profile visit to Australia he wrote of the Aborigines, 'they are the most revolting form of living creatures I've ever seen'.

Defining moment

Royal family meet Wallis

November 1934

Edward's less than discreet affair with Wallis Simpson comes to a head in 1934 when Edward invites Simpson to an evening party at Buckingham Palace. Edward's father had originally struck her name out of the list of invitations but Edward invited her, regardless. When George finds out, he becomes outraged and shouts his disapproval. Simpson is subsequently frozen out of all royal family functions. This puts enormous strain on the relationship between Edward and his father, lending more fuel to the suspicion that Edward will abdicate when George dies.

Timeline

1894

A prince is born
Edward Windsor is born at White Lodge, Richmond Park London to George and Mary, the Duke and Duchess of York. He is given the title His Highness Prince Edward of York.
23 June 1894

The Prince at Dartmouth
On the wishes of his family, Edward joins the navy as an officer cadet at Dartmouth Navy College. He spends two years there before becoming a Midshipman.
September 1909

Prince of Wales and heir apparent
On the death of Edward VII, Edward's father becomes the King of Britain and her empire. Edward is immediately invested as the Prince of Wales and is now next in line to the throne.
23 June 1910

War
At the outbreak of World War I, Edward joins the Grenadier guards and asks to serve at the front. This request is refused by the Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener.
28 July 1914

Time magazine story
Time magazine publishes a story in which Edward is reported to have said that he would abdicate the throne. This is officially denied, but the story serves as an insight into his thoughts.
29 April 1929

communists and the world would be at peace – there was really nothing to worry about as far as he was concerned.

The fact that Edward was for the appeasement of Hitler was not unusual; many members of the British establishment were in the late Thirties. What was compounding the issue was the Nazi party was seen to be influencing the King through Wallis. Whether this was true or not is debatable but many influential people saw it so; the American ambassador commented, 'many people here suspect that Mrs Simpson is actually in German pay.' The situation was looking bad and as an illustration of the tense atmosphere, Edward suffered an assassination attempt when a lone gunman apparently working for an undisclosed foreign power tried to pull a gun on him. When Edward returned to Buckingham Palace the first sympathy call was from Hitler.

Then in November 1936 Edward told Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin that he was going to marry Wallis. Baldwin rejected the proposal, stating that it would be unacceptable to the British cabinet if the head of state married a twice-divorcee. Wallis herself expected full marriage, and Edward refused to give her up. He saw no option; on the 11 December he announced to Britain and the empire, "I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as King... without the help and support of the woman I love." He abdicated the throne, passing the duty to his brother Albert, the father of Queen Elizabeth II.

Edward and Wallis were now in limbo. They were granted official titles, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, but were frozen out of much of the public salary they should have received for the role. Once again Edward fell into a deep depression, he relied on the hospitality of friends abroad and used the Château de Candé in France to marry Wallis. He became an embittered and ungrateful guest, running up huge phone bills and refusing to pay for anything. He also continued to make horrendous errors in judgement, conducting a tour of Nazi Germany in 1937 and allowing himself to be photographed with Hitler.

> Edward was stanchly anti-communist and feared the communist takeover of Europe during the Thirties

In 1940, as a way of preventing any more embarrassment to the royal family, Winston Churchill gave the Duke a governorship in the Bahamas. Edward saw it for what it was – a way to get him out of the way. He conducted his duties, made inroads into improving the situations of the workers on the islands but hated his current position none the less. He had become increasingly estranged from his family.

By the time the war was over and the dust had settled over his relationship with Wallis, the Duke was content to live quietly. He established himself in France at the 4 Route du Champ d'Entraînement Paris, later to be known as Villa Windsor, where he spent the rest of his days in retirement. He had lived a privileged life but it was a life he did not want, in the end he gave up the power he inherited at birth for the woman he loved.

Edward preparing to inform the nation that he is abdicating the throne in 1936

Defining moment

Abdication
10 December 1936

Edward makes it clear to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin that he will not change his mind about marrying Wallis as soon as her second divorce is finalised. Baldwin informs Edward that the cabinet and the imperial parliaments will not accept his marriage to Wallis if he still wishes to be king. With Edward finding it impossible to reconcile his personal life with his duty as a future monarch, he finally decides to abdicate and signs the act at Fort Belvedere in the presence of his younger brother Albert the Duke of York who is next in line to the throne.

Life in the time of Edward VIII

The British Empire

Dominions like Canada, Australia and New Zealand governed their own affairs but still held political ties with Britain through the British monarchy. Other countries like Burma and India were governed directly as colonies.

An age of extremes

The huge social upheaval caused by the Great Depression created a credibility gap between liberal governments and their citizens in Europe. This gave rise to extremist governments from the left and right.

Role of the monarchy

The role of the monarchy in Britain and throughout the Commonwealth was changing in the wake of the mass media. It was no longer enough for the monarch to simply open Parliament once a year, the Royal family was expected to set an example.

Colonial unrest

The Thirties gave rise to independence movements in many imperial colonies. The most vocal of these movements came from India and Mahatma Gandhi's freedom group. While the British government doggedly hung on to its empire in India, the British people started to wonder if it was worth it

Britain, a waning power?

No-one could dispute that British influence throughout the globe remained strong during the Thirties, but the government's reluctance to rearm and prepare for war in the face of fascist and communist threats was said to be indicative of an waning power that no longer had the stomach for military commitments.

- **Succession to the throne**
  George V dies and Edward is immediately put forward for the succession. It also becomes known within the government that he intends to soon marry Wallis.
  20 January 1936

- **Assassination attempt**
  A man called George McMahon pulls a gun on Edward and is quickly set upon by police. He testifies that he was working for a foreign power although this is never proved.
  16 July 1936
- **Marriage to Wallis**
  Edward and Wallis marry at the Château de Candé in France. While the service is attended by a number of high-profile socialites, none of the royal family attends.
  3 June 1937
- **Visit to Germany**
  Against the advice of the British Government, Edward and Wallis visit Nazi Germany and are warmly welcomed by Adolf Hitler. It is reported that he almost gives a Nazi salute.
  October 1937

- **Governor of the Bahamas**
  In an effort to prevent Edward and Wallis, now Duke and Duchess of Windsor, from embarrassing the British government even more, Edward is given the governorship of the Bahamas.
  18 August 1940
- **Retirement**
  With the war won and the new world order establishing itself in Europe, France becomes safe again for British citizens. Edward and Wallis retire there comfortably.
  November 1952

1972

- **Death of a Duke**
  Edward dies peacefully in his sleep aged 77. His body is flown back to England and a funeral service is attended by Queen Elizabeth II. His body is buried at the royal burial ground at Frogmore.
  28 May 1972

© Alamy

1926 – present

Elizabeth II

After more than 60 years on the throne, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II remains one of history's most popular monarchs

Her Majesty the Queen may not have led armies into glorious battle or faced down bloodthirsty rebellions in far-flung corners of her realm, yet she remains one of the most popular and beloved rulers to have ever worn the crown. Her reign as queen is also the longest the nation has ever known. Such a lengthy tenure may seem less noteworthy in an age removed from murderous plots and usurping royal relatives, but Elizabeth has nonetheless sat resolute in her duties through the latter half of the 20th century and the burgeoning years of the 21st – a time when the Western world metamorphosed in the wake of two world wars. Britain and her many territories have undergone quite the transformation, and the role of monarch and the royal family has changed drastically along with it.

After more than six decades as the head of state, Elizabeth has faced the perils, challenges and benefits of being a monarch in the modern age. Gone are the threats of invasion, intrigue and insurrections, replaced instead by satire, media scandals and the weight of public opinion. She remains the most well-travelled of any British monarch and her tireless work with hundreds of charities around the world set a precedent that has typified the role of a modern-day royal.

It seems bizarre then, when you consider the extent of her future reign, that the young Princess Elizabeth was barely a consideration for the throne as a child. Born on 21 April 1926, the daughter of Prince Albert, Duke of York, Elizabeth was at the time third in the line of succession behind her uncle, the Prince of Wales, and her father. However, as was royal protocol, it was assumed that her uncle would almost certainly father children of his own, pushing Elizabeth further down the line. She was never expected to become queen.

But to the young princess, such trivialities were of little concern. Nicknamed 'Lillibet' by her family, she enjoyed a close relationship with her father, her mother Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (later the Queen Mother) and her grandfather, George V. The king's health was already deteriorating by the time Elizabeth was born, but her regular visits and playful relationship with the ailing monarch were said to have buoyed his spirits far more than any medicine. Her positive effect was even covered by newspapers – a taste of just how obsessed the media could, and would, become with its own monarchy. Still, Elizabeth got to enjoy the pomp and privilege of being a royal without the pressures of being an heir apparent or an heir presumptive. However, no one could see the turn of events that came next.

> After WWII, the young Elizabeth saved up her ration coupons to afford the material for her wedding dress

The king was dead. George V had finally passed away from a worsening bout of septicaemia on 20 January 1936, with the throne then passing to his eldest son, the Prince of Wales. Crowned King Edward VIII, it was apparent from the very start that Edward wasn't going to be a conventional king. Known for his vocal dislike of court protocols and politicians, the new monarch even broke convention by watching the proclamation of his own ascendancy from a window in St James's Palace. By his side stood Wallis Simpson, an American socialite whom the 41-year-old king had been courting for some time. Edward's association with the once divorced and still married (to her second husband) Simpson was already causing outrage in royal and political circles alike, but it would take his decision to propose to her a few months later to tip the balance.

ELIZABETH II

England, 1926–present

Brief Bio

Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain may not have faced the religious upheaval and Spanish Armadas of her Tudor namesake, but her six-decades-long reign has been just as memorable. Crowned in the aftermath of WWII, Elizabeth has had to deal with a fluctuating relationship with British politics, an evolving Commonwealth and even the very purpose of a monarch in the modern age.

The Queen sent her first email in 1976. She sent the message over ARPANET, a small-scale precursor to the internet

The annus horribilis

1992 was an eventful and difficult year for Queen Elizabeth II

There have been a number of challenging years in Elizabeth's considerable reign, but 1992 proved to be one her worst. Despite it marking the 40th anniversary of her ascension to the throne, those 12 months were littered with political issues and startling catastrophes that likely pushed the normally resolute monarch to her limits. Elizabeth named the period her 'annus horribilis' (likely a reference to John Dryden's poem of the same name that describes London in the grip of the Great Plague and Great Fire of London in 1666).

It all started in March when her second son, Prince Andrew Duke of York, separated from his wife Sarah Ferguson duchess of York. The couple made an official announcement stating the separation was amicable, but speculation was rife that all was not so rosy behind the scenes. These rumours seemingly sprung to life a few months later when photos of the duchess topless with her lover appeared all over the tabloid newspapers. It was an incredibly embarrassing episode for the royal household and it didn't bode well for the rest of the year.

The incidents continued a month after the duke and duchess' split in March with another member of the royal family. Her daughter Anne, the Princess Royal, had married Mark Phillips, a lieutenant in the 1st Queen's Dragoon Guards, in 1973 and it seemed another fairy-tale royal union to captivate the public. However, the couple decided to separate in 1989, citing years of strain stemming from Phillips' military commitments. In April 1992 the couple officially divorced, further adding to a media-fuelled story that the royal family was splintering under the strain of being in the public eye.

In June, things got even worse. The journalist Andrew Morton had just released his biography of the princess of Wales, *Diana: Her True Story*, and it was filled with sensational stories regarding Diana and her deteriorating relationship with Prince Charles. The couple's fairy-tale relationship had been falling apart as early as the mid-1980s and the two were openly seeing other people despite still being married. Diana's affair with Major James Hewitt, Charles's liaison with Camilla Parker-Bowles and Diana's supposed suicidal thoughts were sensationalised in gruesome detail and it caused the Queen, and her whole royal family, a great deal of embarrassment for years to come.

To top it all off, one of the Queen's favourite residences was badly damaged by a raging inferno in the same year. On the 20 November – a mere four days before the Queen would give her Guildhall speech in which she referred to her year as her annus horribilis – Windsor Castle caught fire, causing severe damage to the whole structure. So bad was the damage that it cost an estimated £36.5 million to repair over the following five years. The blaze started when a spotlight caused a curtain to catch alight and it soon spread through the entire castle in a matter in minutes. There were no serious injuries and no deaths as a result of the blaze, but the royal administration was forced to open Buckingham Palace soon after in order to help fund the castle's restoration program.

As the first female monarch in 51 years, Elizabeth knew many challenges faced her in a rapidly changing world

Mounting pressure from the rest of the royal family and Parliament forced the king to choose between his duties as a monarch and his love for a woman judged too politically troublesome to be his queen. Edward, forever the rebel, chose his heart over his crown and abdicated on 10 December 1936 after 326 days as king (among the shorter reigns of British monarchs). This unforeseen decision threw Edward's younger brother, Elizabeth's father, onto the throne. With her father crowned George VI on 12 May 1937, the 11-year-old princess was no longer a carefree child, but an heir presumptive to the British throne. (An heir presumptive is someone who is first in line to the throne, but whose position can be superseded by a stronger claim – conversely, an heir apparent is someone in the same position, minus the chance of a challenge.)

It was during her early teens that Elizabeth met Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark. The two began a slow courtship, with Philip travelling regularly as part of his service in the Royal Navy – eventually the young couple announced their engagement on 9 July 1947. Her choice of fiancé caused friction with some members of the royal court. Philip had very little financial standing and his family had marital ties to the Nazi party in Germany, but his conversion from Greek Orthodoxy to Anglicanism and the taking of his mother's family name, Mountbatten, helped ease the union in the eyes of his detractors. The two married later that year on 20 November at Westminster Abbey. Despite the hundreds of presents the couple received from around the world, Elizabeth refused to allow the wedding to be a lavish affair.

Despite his royal responsibilities as both a duke and then a king, George VI enjoyed a close and positive relationship with his two daughters

With her reign spanning over six decades, Elizabeth has become an intrinsic part of Britain's cultural identity

As the health of King George VI began to deteriorate, Elizabeth and Philip's first two children were born – Prince Charles, born on 14 November 1948 and Princess Anne born on 15 August 1950. Elizabeth was enjoying her new role as mother, yet her responsibilities on behalf of the king were becoming more time-consuming as she travelled Europe on his behalf to visit those countries still recovering from the scars of World War II. On 6 February 1952, the king eventually succumbed to the melting pot of cancers and tumours that were robbing him of life. And, just like that, the 25-year-old princess became the new monarch of the realm.

Elizabeth was crowned at Westminster Abbey on 2 June 1953, following over a year's worth of national mourning for the late king. Elizabeth chose to retain her given name as her regnal title and, under the advisement of prime minister Winston Churchill and her mother, the surname of Windsor (instead of her husband's family name). Upon her ascension she was officially crowned Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Union of South Africa, Pakistan and Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka).

The Commonwealth Of Nations, as it would come to be known, was an idea that began to form before Elizabeth was even born, yet it was under her reign that the Commonwealth swelled in size and became more than a gathering of former British territories. Many of these overseas nations were beginning to crave autonomy from Britain and the new queen embraced the idea fully. She and Philip, now the Duke of Edinburgh, began a six-month tour of the Commonwealth almost immediately following her coronation. With Europe still in a state of physical, economical and political recovery from World War II, Elizabeth's arrival had an almost talismanic effect. She even travelled further afield, becoming the first British reigning monarch to visit both Australia and New Zealand.

In 1956, Elizabeth experienced her first political misstep. Following the rise of nationalism in Egypt, Britain made a joint attempt with France to take control of the Suez Canal in Egypt. It was a short-lived effort and Britain was forced to withdraw as the USA attempted to appease the situation diplomatically. It was an embarrassing episode for the Conservative administration at the time, made worse by rumours that Elizabeth had been against invasion from the start. The prime minister, Anthony Eden, denied such a claim, but it was enough to undermine his position and he soon resigned. At this time, the Conservative government had no formal process to appoint a new prime minister in the middle of a parliamentary term.

The decision fell to Elizabeth who, under advisement, appointed Harold Macmillan as Eden's replacement. The decision, along with the Suez Canal fiasco, led to considerable criticism of the Queen from MPs, lords and the media. It was a stark reminder that the days of the monarch as a ruler were firmly resigned to the history books.

The Queen has two birthdays: an official one celebrated in June by the Trooping the Colour ceremony, and her real one on 21 April

Life in the time of Elizabeth II

Empire to Commonwealth

During her reign, the realm has evolved from the British empire into the Commonwealth of Nations. This transition is the result of the decolonisation of the empire into an intergovernmental organisation that consists of 53 nations (mostly former British colonies) that are recognised as equal member states.

A shift in power

The actual power the king or queen of England can enact upon the realm is a shadow of its former self. The time of absolute royal authority is a thing of the past and Elizabeth II is bound by a constitutional agreement with Parliament that limits her influence over policies and legislation.

Travelling the globe

Elizabeth II remains one of the most well-travelled monarchs in British history. As the head of the Commonwealth, she flew to Canada in 1958 and opened the 23rd Parliament there, which served as just one of the ways that the crown has recognised the semi-autonomy of its member states.

Silver jubilee

In 1977, Elizabeth II celebrated the 25th anniversary of her accession to the throne. To mark the occasion, she and Prince Philip visited 36 counties – no monarch had visited so many parts of the UK within such a small amount of time.

Media frenzy

Public interest in the royal family had always been high, but the media's focus on royals took an alarmingly sensational turn in the 1980s. The media ran endless stories about how the Queen disapproved of prime minister Margaret Thatcher's often unpopular policies, fuelling rumours of a division between crown and government.

Once Elizabeth became queen, she travelled tirelessly across the world, including this trip to West Germany in 1965

So what were Elizabeth's political powers? Well, while Parliament holds autonomy from the crown in terms of its infrastructure, the king or queen still holds some administrative (be they mostly ceremonial) authorities. Elizabeth has the power to open and dissolve Parliament prior to a general election, as well the right to consult the prime minister on issues of state at any time. That's not to say that Elizabeth's position as queen is simply a figurehead – as monarch, Elizabeth must ratify all bills passed through Parliament. This is known as Royal Assent, and it's a political procedure that's not been refused since its creation in 1707. Even the Queen's speech (not to be confused with the Queen's Christmas message), delivered in Parliament every year, forms an important role, signifying royal approval of a new year in legislation.

Despite all her travels, the Queen doesn't have a passport. Since the crown issues them, Her Majesty is exempt from needing to have one

While the 1960s and 1970s were a transformative period for Britain and the Commonwealth, with over 20 countries gaining independence, the 1980s were a mixed affair. Despite issues with rising unemployment, the nation was united in celebrating the union of Elizabeth's eldest son, Prince Charles with Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. It was a lavish affair and the presence of the bright, young princess-to-be was a breath of fresh air for the royal family's public image. Sadly, the jovial public mood was curtailed when the Falklands War broke out the following year. Even the Queen's middle child, Prince Andrew, took part in the Royal Navy's conflict with Argentinean forces in the South Atlantic. Despite her concerns, Elizabeth wanted Andrew to remain

The abdication
20 January-1 December 1936

1936 is a very tumultuous year for the royal family. In January, King George V (Elizabeth's grandfather) dies. The throne then passes to his eldest son Albert, who becomes Edward VIII. However, the uncrowned Edward chooses to abdicate less than 12 months later and his brother (and Elizabeth's father) the Duke of York becomes King George VI. With her father now presiding on the throne, Elizabeth becomes first in line to the throne at the age of ten. During this period, Princess Elizabeth is also referred to by the official title of 'heir presumptive'.

Elizabeth is crowned
2 June 1953

Following the death of her father, George VI, towards the end of 1952, the 26-year-old heir presumptive is finally crowned Queen Elizabeth II. Despite the tradition that the husband's surname is taken, it is decreed that Elizabeth will retain her family name of Windsor instead of Philip's name Mountbatten. At the time, Philip complains that, "I am the only man in the country not allowed to give his name to his own children." To appease the situation, the name Mountbatten-Windsor is adopted in 1960 for any male-line descendants who do not carry royal titles.

Timeline

1926

Elizabeth is born
Born Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor, the young princess is the daughter of George, Duke of York (later George VI) and Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (later Queen and then Queen Mother).
21 April 1926

Young love
In 1934 and 1937, the young princess meets with Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark. In 1939 they meet for a third time at the Royal Navy College in Dartmouth, with the 13-year-old Elizabeth remarking that she has fallen in love with the 18-year-old prince.
22 July 1939

Marriage to Philip
Princess Elizabeth marries Philip at Westminster Abbey after almost 15 years of slow courtship. Since tensions are still running high from the global catastrophe that was World War II, Philip's German relatives are not permitted to attend.
20 November 1947

Prince Charles is born
A month prior to the arrival of Elizabeth's first son, Charles, her father George VI decrees that any of her children will retain the title of prince or princess. This overturns the rules set out by George V that restricted such titles to children of the monarch or the monarch's son.
14 November 1948

For over 70 years the Queen Mother remained a source of guidance and inspiration, up to her death in 2001

in his original posting – a public decision that showed her pride as a mother as much as her commitment as queen. (A fact made all the more chilling when you consider Argentina planned to assassinate the prince during the conflict.)

Despite the high points of the previous decade, the 1990s were a challenging time for Elizabeth and the rest of the royal family. A fire at Windsor Castle at the tail end of 1992 caused catastrophic damage and destroyed priceless royal heirlooms, while the script for the Queen's speech was leaked and published by *The Sun* newspaper a year later. To make things even worse, the very public disintegration of Charles and Diana's marriage had become regular fodder for the British and international media. The publication of the Diana biography *Diana: Her True Story*, with its claims of an ongoing affair between the princess of Wales and Major James Hewitt, brought further strain on the royal family. Charles and Diana's eventual separation in 1993 would lead to years of criticism of the royal family's conduct as Diana rose to prominence as a charity worker. This scrutiny would fail to abate, even when Diana was tragically killed in a car crash in Paris in 1997.

Elizabeth II is the longest-reigning British monarch. Queen Victoria holds second place at 63 years and 216 days

The last decade and a half has seen the royal family enjoy a far more positive reception in the public eye. The death of the Queen Mother and Elizabeth's younger sister, Princess Margaret, in the space of two months in 2002 saw an outpouring of public support for the Queen, which flowed seamlessly into celebrations for the golden jubilee later that summer. Not one to let personal feelings affect her royal duties, Elizabeth set out on an extensive tour of the Commonwealth and returned to mass celebrations that surprised many, most notably the media. Her diamond jubilee a decade later further cemented the nation's more positive relationship with the crown, with celebrations across the land merging with excitement for London's hosting of the Olympics in 2012.

And now, aged 89 and recently becoming the longest-reigning monarch in our country's history, the Queen still exudes the same principles of character she learned in those early years of her rule. She's a monarch who understands her place in the anatomy of a modern nation, less concerned with how history remembers her, but how she can serve the realm. As generations of younger royals continue to attract most media attention away from her, Elizabeth still remains an iconic figure in the identity of Britain and the Commonwealth.

The Falklands War

In comparison to the World War she lived through as a princess, the confrontation over the Falklands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands was a relatively low-key affair. Nonetheless, Great Britain's involvement in the ten-day crisis was covered in meticulous detail by the media, including the deployment of her second son, Prince Andrew, into the conflict.

The war itself was fought over the sovereignty of a number of islands in the South Atlantic, most notably the Falkland Islands (an archipelago consisting of two large islands and 776 smaller ones) with a population of just under 3,000 people. The Falklands had been a crown colony since 1841, but nearby Argentina refused to recognise Great Britain's claim, believing the islands to be Argentinian soil. On 2 April 1982, Argentina landed on the islands with a contingent of 600 troops and proceeded to take control of the whole area. Considering, though never officially stating, the invasion an act of war, the British government responded by sending the Royal Navy to engage the Argentinian navy and air force, as well as landing an amphibious assault on the island. The conflict lasted for two months, one week and five days and ended with Argentina's surrender. While 258 British sea and airmen were killed during the conflict, almost 650 soldiers died on the Argentinian side.

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"She understands her place in the anatomy of a modern nation"

Prince Edward is born
Four years after the birth of Andrew, Elizabeth gives birth to third son Edward. The young prince is third in line to the throne at his time of birth, but in 2015 is now eighth in the order of succession; he's now known as the Earl of Wessex.
10 March 1964

The diamond jubilee
2-5 June 2012

In the summer of 2012, Elizabeth celebrates a whole 60 years as Queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. In a speech on Accession Day, Elizabeth says: "In this special year, as I dedicate myself anew to your service, I hope we will all be reminded of the power of togetherness and the convening strength of family, friendship and good neighbourliness." She and Philip tour the country extensively as part of the celebrations, with their children and grandchildren travelling across the Commonwealth on her behalf. A month later, Elizabeth officially opens the 2012 Olympic Games on 27 July and the Paralympic Games on 29 August.

Prince Andrew is born
At the beginning of 1960 – almost seven years into her reign as queen – Elizabeth gives birth to her second son, Prince Andrew, in the Belgian Suite of Buckingham Palace. He is baptised three months later.
19 February 1960

The silver jubilee
In 1977, Elizabeth celebrates the first major anniversary of her accession. A monarch's jubilee is based on the date they were proclaimed king or queen rather than that of their coronation. To celebrate, festivities and parties are held all across the Commonwealth during the year.
1977

Charles weds Diana
After a widely publicised courtship, Prince Charles marries Lady Diana Spencer at St Paul's Cathedral in a ceremony that captivates Great Britain and the wider world. The marriage will produce two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry.
29 July 1981

Diana passes away
Just as her wedding had captured the hearts and minds of the nation, the death of Diana, Princess of Wales is just as publicly scrutinised. Despite Elizabeth II requesting the divorce of Diana and Charles in 1995, Diana still remained a hugely popular figure.
31 Aug 1997

The Golden Jubilee
In 2002, Elizabeth marks the 50th anniversary of her accession to the throne. Despite the celebrations across the Commonwealth, the event is bittersweet, as the Queen Mother and Elizabeth's sister Princess Margaret have died a few months previously.
2002

2016

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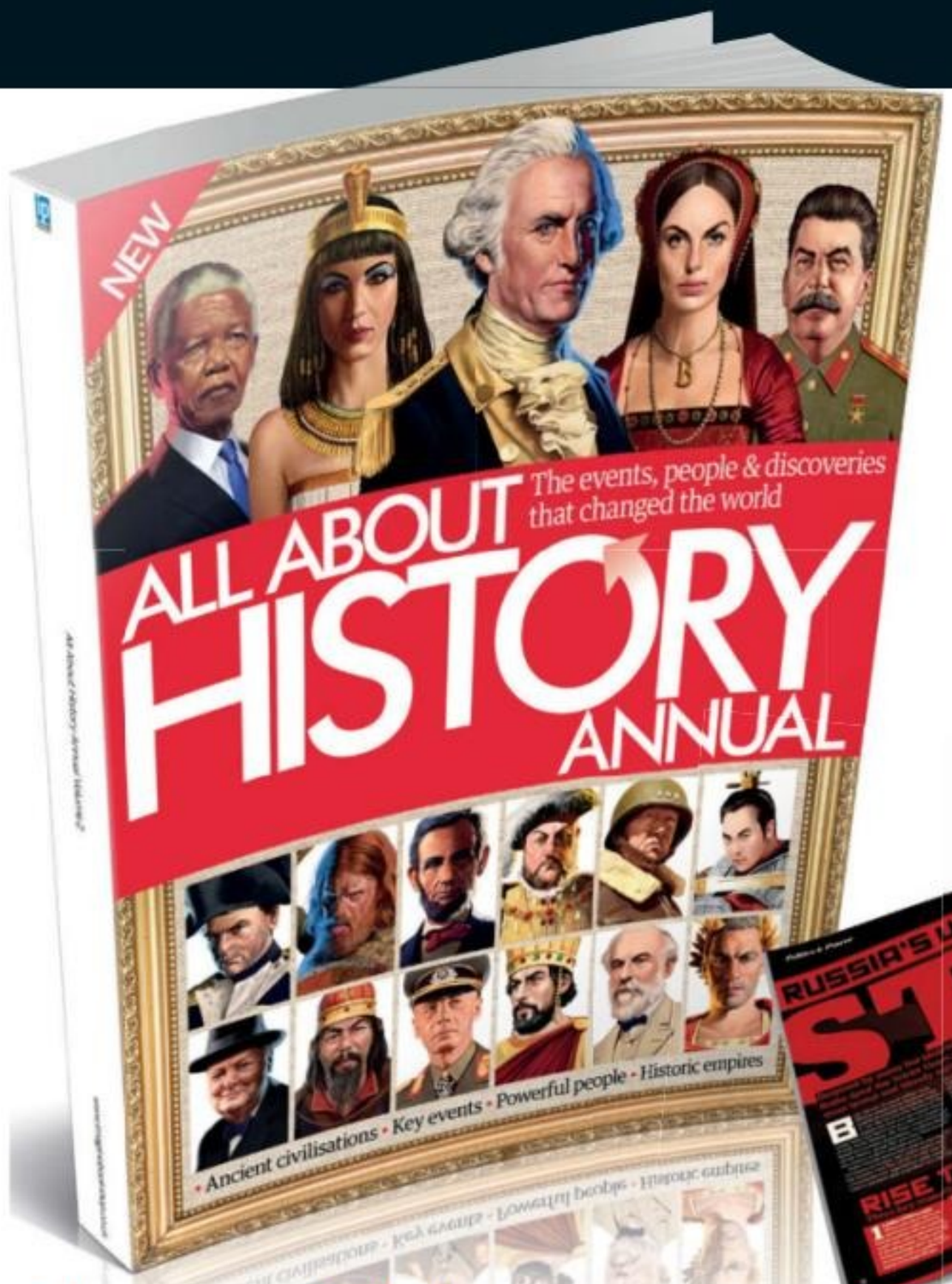
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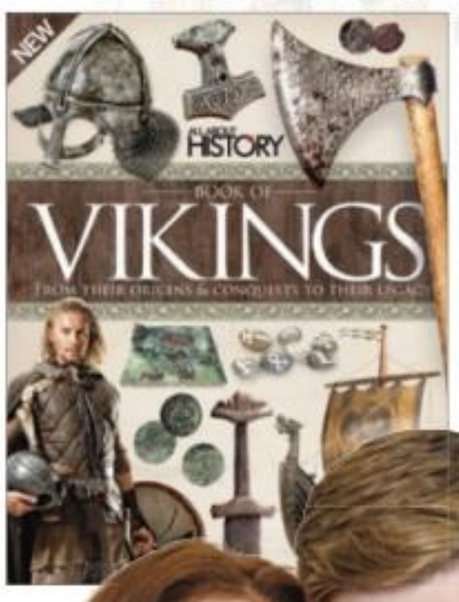

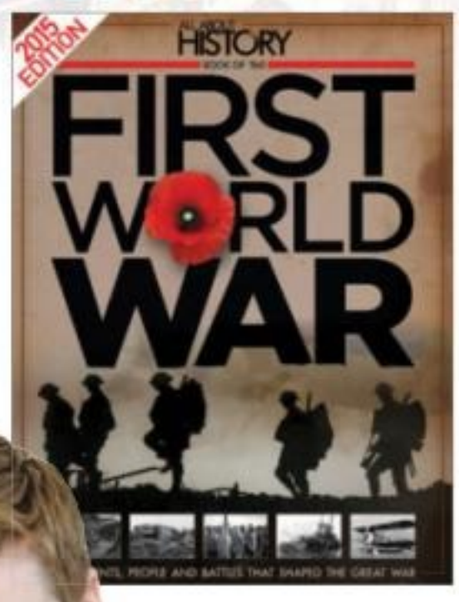

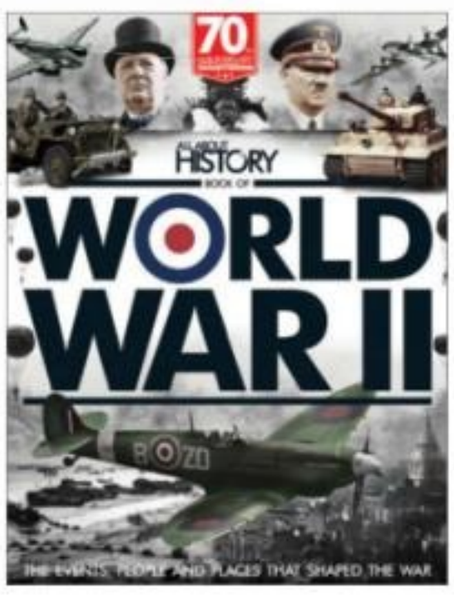

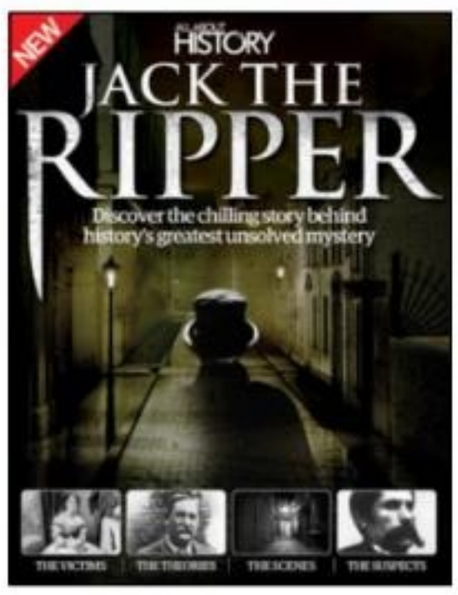

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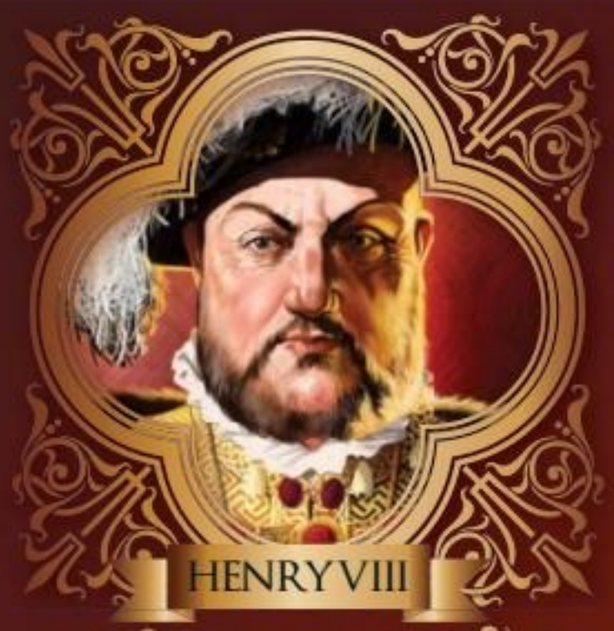
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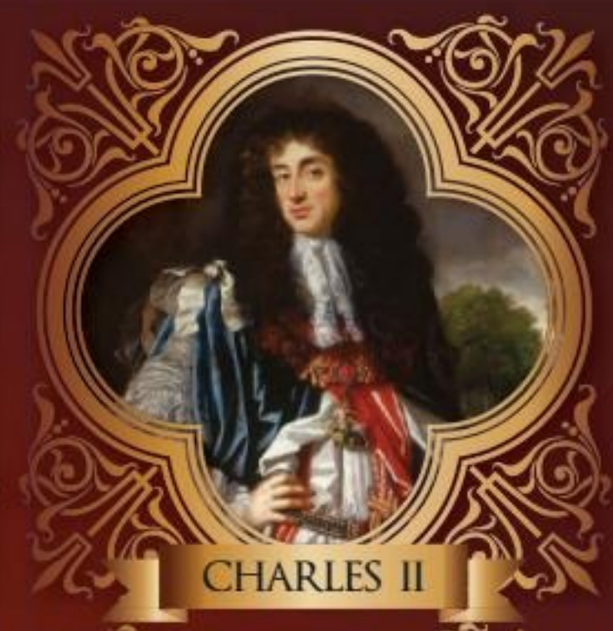
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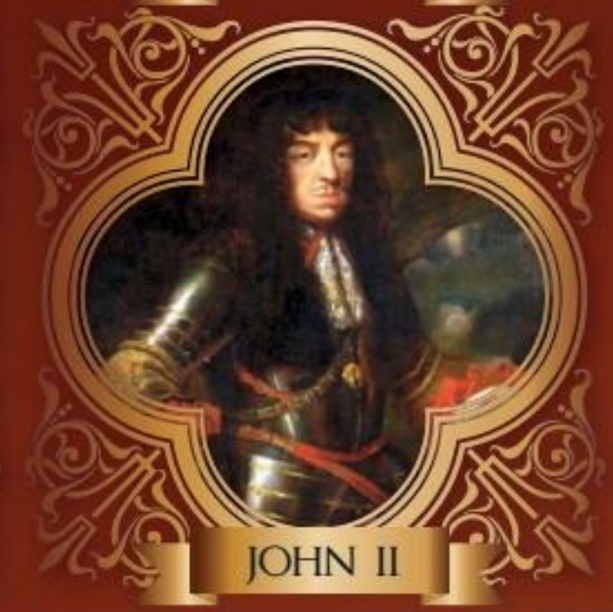
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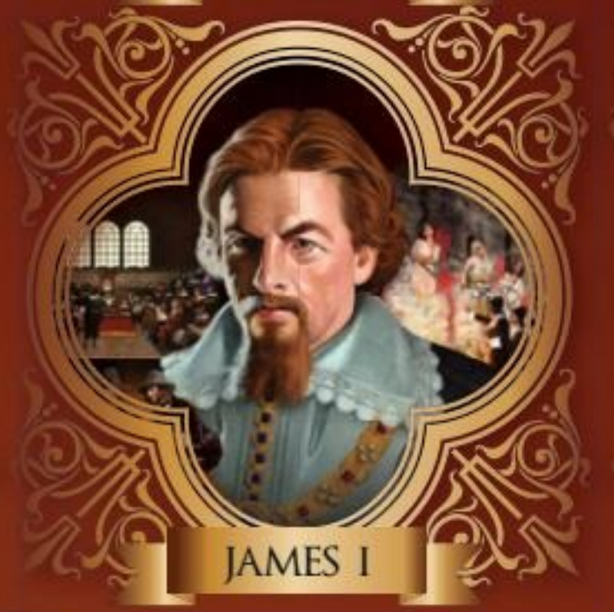
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